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CARLYON'S YEAR

CARLYON'S YEAR.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD,"

ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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Reprinted from "ONCE A WEEK."

CARLYON'S YEAR.

CHAPTER I.

MR. SCRIVENS' LITTLE MISTAKE.

THOSE who collect the statistics of death-bed scenes, without the intention of confounding the sceptic, are aware that, for the most part, folks die as they have lived; that is to say, according to their several constitutions. Good Christians, if of a nervous temperament, are alarmed. Phlegmatic persons, even if they have no sure grounds of religious belief, are to the last (what their friends call) "philosophic." People little accustomed to thought of any kind, rarely

feel, or, at all events, exhibit, any mental emotion. An old officer of experience once told me that he had seen upwards of a hundred soldiers die in hospital, and not one of them was moved by the prospect of dissolution at all. At the same time it must be owned that much of this immobility may arise from the indefiniteness of the time when death shall be actually knocking at the gate. People talk of the uncertainty of life as a reason for repentance; but, in reality, its uncertainty is the great encouragement for procrastination. There may be no hope, but also the danger often does not appear immediate, until it has actually overwhelmed us. Criminals, it is true, when their day of certain doom draws nigh, are, in many cases, terribly agitated; but these last are exceptionably bad subjects for any such trial, since they have especial good reasons for feeling remorse, and

for fearing retribution. The old are, as a general rule, least impressed with the nearness of dissolution. They have lived so long without dying, that it has become, as it were, a confirmed habit with them; and they cannot picture to themselves, while still in tolerable health, so radical a change.

In Carlyon's case, if Mr. Carstairs had confined himself to saying, "You have heart complaint of the most serious character; you may die any day; your life is not worth six months' purchase," his patient would not, perhaps, have been much moved; but the addition, "I do not think it possible," or "I will pledge my professional reputation,"—which was it?—"that you will not live a year," made the professional opinion very striking.

Carlyon sat alone in the dark little chamber, looking forth upon the many-

flowered garden, faint and odorous in the hot noon, and strange thoughts indeed were busy within him. He had read long ago at school in some Latin author, (he did not even remember that it was Cicero,) "No man is so old but that he imagines he will live a year;" and this line, arising in his mind sudden and unsummoned as a ghost, began to haunt it. There was no man in health, then, in the whole world, so old but that he looked to live longer (by so much time as the doctor had already left the house) than himself. Curiously enough, while thus confining himself rigidly within the life-limit assigned, this man did not now consider the probability of dying in the interim. The apprehension that had caused him so hastily to dispatch the groom to Burnthorp was already gone. It seemed as though some warning such as is stated to have sometimes

come to mortals from beyond the grave, had fixed his death at a certain date. Only a year, neither more nor less, save by a few minutes, to live. How strange it seemed to think that this self-same sunny hour would never return for him again. Thus, every succeeding day would be the last of its date for him. That, after a few weeks, no summer would shine for him more; no autumn after the next bear its fair fruit; no winter—this was his favourite season—afford its usual sports, save once. Then spring, which to all his kind was the welcome herald of so much, would come only to make the earth green for his grave! How strange it seemed that the occurrence of no one of nature's operations should (precisely) take place for him again! Never to see the shadow of yonder dial begin to lengthen on the grass, exactly as it was doing to-day. Stay; would it ever do so

exactly. His mind began to seek what little science was in it to imagine how this might be. Then it reverted to the dial, and thence, naturally enough, to the story of King Hezekiah.

"There will be no miracle done for my sake, I suppose," muttered he, with bitterness. Then, losing his scornful look, he added, tenderly, "When she hears this, how she will pray that I may improve my year of grace. Sweet soul!"

His hand mechanically sought the letter in his pocket, and at the touch of it his brow grew dark.

Only one quarter gone of the earliest time in which he could expect Mr. Scrivens to arrive. If hours were to pass like this his life would be a long one after all. He sat down to write, and occupied himself with certain papers, until there was a far-off sound

of wheels: some vehicle was slowly entering the great gates; a craunch upon the gravel sweep. Yes, he was come.

A red little dapper man was Mr. Scrivens, bald, except for a rim of sandy hair, and with a ferret face half hidden by huge red whiskers, which it was his constant ambition to get both in his mouth at once. Holding one fast between his teeth, and coaxing the other with his white hand (of which he was very vain) towards the same trap, was his habitual occupation; and when he had succeeded in the double capture, he would let them go, and begin again. Notwithstanding this impediment to conversation, his words flowed like a river. He had not been at all put out by the suddenness of Mr. Carlyon's summons; quite the contrary; he was delighted, charmed, after so many years, to revisit Woodlees. The last time was—ahem—upon a very

melancholy occasion. "A good man, sir, was your poor father, an excellent man. Yes, yes."

"I sent for you thus hastily, Mr. Scrivens, upon a business matter, which to me, at least, seems pressing," began Carlyon, without noticing these interjectional remarks. "At present, I believe, in case of my dying intestate, all the property I possess would go to my sister——"

"Real *and* personal, sir, without doubt. And a very pretty property, too. Mrs. Newman is well, I trust, sir; Mr. Jedediah, your nephew, I had the pleasure of seeing——"

"I wish to make a will, Mr. Scrivens. Here are ink and paper, be so good as to take my instructions."

"Very right and very proper, my dear sir," observed the lawyer, encouragingly; "one of the first things that a man should do, upon

emerging from what the law holds to be infancy, is to make a will—that is, provided that he has anything to leave; otherwise the precaution is needless. Even in your case, a man in the prime of life, with what I may venture to call a constitution of iron——"

"To my nephew, Jedediah Newman, I wish to leave the sum of five hundred pounds, Mr. Scrivens."

"Just so, sir. Something for himself, as it were, independent of mamma, eh? Young men often stand much in need of such forethought as you display. Not that your nephew, let us hope, with the example of so excellent a mother before his eyes, so prudent, so—ahem—so discreet, would be likely to have embarrassed himself."

"My nephew is a scamp, I believe," observed Carlyon, drily; "but that is no matter to me. I wish to leave him five hundred pounds."

the case, all other things give place. Ahem! Permit me to congratulate you, my dear sir, with all my heart. I have heard the young lady spoken of very highly."

Carlyon bowed with considerable stiffness, and signed that his companion should resume his writing.

"No, sir, no," said Mr. Scrivens, gaily, and with a whisker in each hand, "the thing can't be done—at least, not at present."

"Then I'll get somebody else to do it," ejaculated the other.

"My dear sir, you mistake me," pursued the lawyer, blandly. "I can, of course, do as you request; but it will all be labour in vain. Dear me, how ignorant you laymen are of the simplest rules of law—though it is not for me to regret it, far from it."

"Will you leave off making those damnable faces, and begin?" shouted Carlyon.

"My dear sir," explained the lawyer, with some precipitation, "these instructions are valueless: that is the simple fact. They will become waste paper upon the day of your union with this young lady. Marriage invalidates——"

"I am not going to be married, sir," interrupted Carlyon, in a voice that made the lawyer's blood run cold. "Now, your impertinent curiosity is satisfied, sir, perhaps you will do as you were told."

CHAPTER II.

MR. RICHARD GETS SOME GOOD ADVICE.

SCARCE a week has elapsed since the incident recorded in our last chapter, but it has witnessed great changes, or what were considered such at Mellor. John Carlyon has broken up his establishment—not, however, without remembrance of those who had belonged to it—and Woodlees is advertised to be sold. These facts alone were dainty dishes enough to be set upon the tea-tables of the neighbourhood; but there were a score of other strange reports respecting the young squire beside. Quite a glut of gossip, in short, and yet the market was very far from dull. The more immediate cause of this

charming state of affairs was old Robin. In spite of his protest that he was "no tittle-tattle," there was no ancient female in the county so incapable of retaining a secret. Nature had ordained that he must out with it or burst. Was it not painful enough to have been the witness of his dear master's seizure, without the additional torture of having to conceal that most interesting occurrence? To expect silence was to be too exacting, too exorbitant. There was no "ambiguous giving out" either, in Robin's reference to this calamity. "Mr. John was in a fit, and Doctor Carstairs a bleedin' on him."

Then followed the scarcely less exciting narration of the sending for Mr. Scrivens. After what had happened, this prompt measure could have been taken for no other purpose than that of preparing a will. Except as to details (which were sought after

with feverish eagerness), no further information was required by an intelligent public. They "put two and two together" with a rapidity unequalled even in the old coaching days.

John Carlyon had had a fit: apoplexy, epilepsy, paralysis; there was a great opportunity here for imagination, and that display of medical science so grateful to the human mind—nay, it was even darkly whispered by some folks, *delirium tremens*. With the prospect of immediate dissolution before his eyes, the sceptic had characteristically concentrated his thoughts upon his temporal affairs. Mr. Scrivens on his part had been, for the present, reticent enough, notwithstanding that Jedediah had ridden over to Burnthorp within the last few days, on pretence of "looking at a horse" which the lawyer happened to wish to part with, and

had endeavoured to pump him; but this announcement of Woodlees to be sold, spoke for itself. John Carlyon must have willed his property away in some direction other than its legitimate channel, else why was the family residence to be thus disposed of?

Mrs. Newman maintained a calm exterior —some people called it "malice at a white heat,"—and only shook her head and touched her forehead when the subject was mentioned. She was understood to imply that her unfortunate brother was not answerable for his actions, and doubtless it would have afforded her great satisfaction if such had been indeed the fact, and the law could have been got to certify it.

Now, as is not unusual in such cases, the person whom all these rumours chiefly pointed to, namely Agnes Crawford, was least aware of their existence. She knew that Carlyon

had left Mellor, and that Woodlees was to be sold, and she had a suspicion, which gnawed the tender heart within her, of what had sent him away. Her conscience reproached her twenty times a day for having done the very thing which it had before insisted upon. Its old self, if I may say so, had now no ally except in those bitter words which Mrs. Newman had flung at her at parting. It was they which had turned the scale in the late conflict within her, and which now played the part of the metropolitan brigade upon the flame of love. But they no longer made head against the devouring element. Now that the goods had been removed, and the fire was confined to the premises, the flaming serpents flickered over the empty rooms and the bare walls at their wild will. Now she had lost him for ever, Agnes began to feel how deeply she had loved Carlyon. And how he must

have loved *her*, since one word of hers had sent him forth, she knew not whither, and made his home so hateful to him that he had resolved to enter it no more!

Was it likely that he would make any use of that sacred book, which had accompanied an answer so curt and so unwelcome? True, its brevity had been agreed upon, nay, proposed by himself; but might she not, nevertheless, have becomingly added something to have made rejection at least less ungracious, considering too that she was addressing, probably for the last time, the preserver of her life? Her cheeks burned while she thought of this, not in self-reproach, but from the consciousness that she had acted thus through love for him. For she had not dared trust her fingers to write more. Ah! if he could have only known what it had cost her to be so coldly brief! But now he would

despise her parting gift, even more than his scepticism would have prompted him to do, from contempt of the giver. She had had it in her power to move his unbelieving heart, perhaps to win it, to the truth; but she had refused to take advantage of so rare and blessed an opportunity. His errors, nay, his very condemnation, might lie at her door. And why? Because she feared, as Mrs. Newman had suggested, being herself perverted from the right way? No; but because she feared to have imputed to her the vulgar, sordid motives she was assumed by that plain-spoken lady to entertain. Such ideas had never so much as entered into her brain; it was only this woman who had thrust them there; but once admitted—like a vile image intruded upon a pure mind—she could no longer be ignorant of their existence. Although she had not been influenced by

them, others, girls like herself, might be so; what Mrs. Newman thought of her, others might think of her. Perhaps Carlyon himself —no, she would not think that; but had not he too expressed his conviction that her father would not oppose himself to their union? Had he then any reason to believe that he was promoting it? Was she being thrown in this rich man's way, as manœuvring mothers were said to throw their daughters? She felt the hot blood tingle to her ear-tips at this shameful thought. And yet to whom, unless to her father, had this woman referred when she had talked of her "springing from no one knows whom or whence?" Agnes shuddered! the red rose turned to white; and she closed her eyes as though to shut out some horrible scene.

Bitter as was the cup she had now to drink, it was perhaps well to do so. Bad as

it seemed, even worse might have befallen; and with that ineffectual balm she strove to heal a wounded heart.

Thus Agnes Crawford argued with herself, now yearning for his love, now fortifying her heart against him with materials from the arsenal of Mrs. Grundy, and now agitated by a nameless sorrow which, arising in the far-back past, threw forward such a shadow as seemed to make gloomy all her future.

It was while meditating on this secret grief, while sitting in her old place by the open window of the drawing-room, looking out upon the empty lawn, that Richard Crawford found her one morning, and took a chair by her side. He had treated her of late with marked but unobtrusive kindness. In the absence of the man he held to be his rival he had become once more his usual self,

affectionately respectful, reverent. He knew that Carlyon had been refused, and therefore that the great obstacle to his success was done away with. He had never despaired until that man came and stepped between him and his cousin from the first, taking advantage of the accident that had introduced himself to her so favourably. If it had not been for his horse, he could not have saved her; and had not *he* (Richard) been equally willing to sacrifice his life for hers? How hateful it was to think that he owed his own safety to this country squire, who held his head so high, and cared for nobody, and could make his way so easily into the woman's heart, which he—her cousin, and an inmate under the same roof—had failed to win. However, this rival was now removed, and as it seemed for ever. If his own place was to be only second in her affections she should still be

his wife; if the other had won, it was he who should wear. As sure as the sun shone she should be his. He had been assured of that all along; but he had not been certain of securing his object by legitimate means. He would have used any had Carlyon intervened between them; but now there would surely be no necessity for proceeding to such extremities. On the other hand, there was no time to lose. He had already received a hint from his uncle, equivalent, as he was well aware, to a peremptory order, that he had taken holiday long enough, and must be prepared for another sea-voyage—perhaps as long as the last. Without a solemn promise from Agnes that she would be his wife, he was resolved not to go. And he was now about to exact it.

"Agnes," said he, with a grave tenderness, that was not assumed, and became the young

man very well, "I have something to say to you."

"Yes, cousin." She turned her head slowly towards him, and her voice, though kind and gentle as always, had the unconcern of pre-occupation in its tone.

"Something," said he, more earnestly, "for which I beg your best attention; it affects us both very nearly, but to me it is all in all."

"Yes, Richard."

A month ago she would have already begun to reprove him; but now she did not seem to apprehend to what such words needs must lead. This coolness galled him far more than her displeasure would have done; but he was very humble and quiet.

"My uncle says that I have had holiday enough, and that I must go to sea again forthwith."

"Poor boy," returned she, pityingly, almost

caressingly; "and yet you do not seem to have been long at home. I think that's hard. I'll ask my father—"

"No, thank you, Agnes," answered he, coldly; "I am not a child to be begged off a day or two from school. I am a man now."

"A very young one, Richard," replied his cousin, smiling. "Nay, don't be cross; you will laugh yourself, when you come home next, with a great beard, perhaps, to think how, as a stripling you once imagined yourself to be a patriarch."

"Don't jest, Agnes, for I can't bear it. As to going to sea, it is my profession; and, as you know, I like it dearly. I don't mind hardships. I would not live a life of idleness, such as I lead here, even if I could. I know one has got one's work to do in the world, and I am no skulker."

"Bravely said, Richard. There is nobody

who will be so proud of you as I shall be when you achieve the success you merit. We two are alone in the world; for, except my father, we have no other kith or kin; and blood is ever so much stronger than water, cousin."

Her white hand sought his shoulder and there rested; her voice had the honest ring of affectionate good-will. But neither touch nor tone were welcome to the recipient.

"Blood is nothing to me," answered the young man, impatiently. "If you sprang from the other side of the world, I should love you equally well. I wish you did, since you vex me so with 'cousin, cousin.'"

"I hope, Richard, you are not going to vex *me*," observed Agnes, withdrawing her hand, "with the same talk which I have already forbidden you to use. That is not behaving like a gentleman."

"What!" exclaimed the young man, passionately; "can it be wrong, when every thought within me shapes itself into the words, 'I love you,' not to utter them? I know I am young, and that there is time to spare. I do not press you to be my wife, Agnes—that is, not yet. I can be patient. I trust to show myself worthy of you before I win you. But, now that I am about to go away, I know not for how long, I want to hear from your own lips a pledge—well, then, not a pledge—I shall be content, God knows, with very, very little. Only a little hope, that is all I ask: one gleam of light to cheer me on my lonely way. Nay, hear me out. Promise me that you will never wed another, never plight your troth to another, until I come back from sea."

"That is very easily done, Richard," returned the young girl, calmly; "and I

would do it gladly, but for that which such a promise would imply. You will find me as you leave me, cousin, you may be sure of that —quite sure."

Carlyon's chance was gone, of that Richard felt certain; but notwithstanding her quiet smile, there was a melancholy in her voice that jarred upon his jealous ear.

"Then, why not give me hope?" urged the young man. "If, as you say," (here he fixed his dark eyes upon her searchingly,) "you do not love another—you *do!* you *do!*" exclaimed he, passionately; "you are deceiving me. This fellow has not really left the place. You are only waiting till my back is turned."

"Sir," said she, with a white face, but speaking very calmly; "you said awhile ago that you regretted we were kith and kin. After such words as you have last spoken, I regret it, too. A man indeed! None but a

reckless boy, forgetting to whom he speaks, could have so transgressed."

"But is it not true?" urged the young man, half abashed, yet still suspicious. "Why did your colour change else, when I said 'you do not love another'? Give me your sacred word, Agnes, that you have not pledged yourself to John Carlyon, and then I will believe you."

"I deny your right to ask me any such question, sir; but if it will put a stop to all such talk as this, once and for ever, I will tell you. Mr. Carlyon has asked me to become his wife, and I have refused him."

"But if he were to do so now?" inquired Richard, eagerly.

"Now, or at any future time, would be the same; I should still refuse him. You seem pleased, sir, with this news. But let me tell you further, since I have said so much, that

what I have said of Mr. Carlyon applies tenfold to you. My purpose is to marry no man. But did I marry, I should choose a gentleman —no eavesdropper, who suspects the woman he pretends to love, nor one who sets a servant to play the spy upon her mistress—yes, I know you, sir. The next time that you propose to yourself to win a woman's heart, be honest, be open, lest, instead of love, you reap contempt, as you have reaped with me."

He had never seen her—no one had ever seen her—half so wrathful, half so moved. Erect to her full height she stood, and flashed her words upon his bent-down head.

"Be honest, be open," reiterated she, as she laid her hand upon the door, "that is my parting advice to you, cousin Richard."

The words seemed to scorch his ears.

"I will take it, cousin Agnes," said he, quietly. "You will see me from henceforth

quite another man." Even while he spoke his mobile countenance grew staid and firm; his thin lips ceased to tremble. "I will, so help me heaven!"

"I hope heaven will, Richard, for you need its help."

She closed the door behind her with those words.

"Yes, I will be open enough," muttered Richard, grimly; "although not with her. She must never know what I am about to do; and, indeed, how should she, since *he* would be the last to tell her? She has only herself to thank for it; she has driven me to it. I would have won her, if I could, by any other way."

He passed out of the room and up the stairs; then took the turning that led to his uncle's chamber. A man-servant coming from that direction, met him with, "The

master is scarcely dressed, sir; he cannot see you yet;" but Richard pushed by him roughly, without reply, and knocked sharply at his uncle's door.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SANCTUM.

"WHAT is the meaning of this intrusion, sir?" inquired Mr. Crawford, as with his gaunt form in dressing-gown and slippers, and the hue of anger upon his withered cheek, he sternly confronted his nephew.

The scene was a curious one, independently of the striking contrast between the actors. Two small rooms, one of which could only be reached by passing through the other, were used by the master of Greycrags as a sanctum, into which none but his body servant and Cubra, and at rare times, his daughter, were admitted. The rest of the household regarded these apartments, cut off as they were

from all others, with a feeling akin to awe. In the dead of night slippered footsteps were often heard pacing to and fro, from bed-room to sitting-room, for hours at a time, albeit, in five of his accustomed strides the old man must have stepped from wall to wall. It was not the impatient tread, which the servants sometimes heard of late from Mr. Richard's room, ere that young gentleman cast himself upon his couch at night, as often as not, with his clothes on, and lay there thinking unutterable things, but one even-paced monotonous walk, such as a man might take who has not had enough of out-door exercise during the day—a prisoner for instance; or one who is accustomed to think most deeply when in motion, with head depressed and hands folded behind the back. However late this went on, there was no stirring of coals, save in the depth of winter

time, for although so old, and as he gave out, so ill, Mr. Crawford rarely allowed himself the luxury of a fire. This little sitting-room, wherein Richard had not set foot before, and which he was now regarding, notwithstanding his uncle's wrath, with most curious attention, was by no means like a boudoir; except for the absence of a bed, its bareness and unliveable look would have better suited a mere sleeping-room. The two chairs it boasted were neither of them easy ones; the table was without a cloth; the book-shelf only contained a diary, (for the old gentleman was most methodical in his habits,) an almanac, and a county directory. The only article of furniture that had any pretensions to be considered ornamental, was a handsome old standing desk of polished oak, which stood against the window. Richard, from his post of espial on the hill, had often seen his uncle

writing at this desk, and watched him, with angry heart, cast ever and anon a well-pleased glance to where Agnes and Carlyon were sitting on the lawn below. There was no door between the two rooms, but only an archway with a curtain, which Mr. Crawford hastily drew across it on the young man's entrance, yet not so quickly but that Richard perceived it to be even more sparely furnished than its twin-chamber, and in particular that it had no bed at all, but only a hammock.

"Do you know, young man, that I never permit *any* person" (this with an angry accent such as implied, "and far less *you*") "to enter my apartment unless I send for him? How *dare* you, sir?"

The eyes flashed fire from under those shaggy brows, and if the voice shook, like the spear in ancient Tarquin's hand, it was more through ire than age.

Upon the other hand, the young man, generally so hasty and impetuous, was very quiet and self-contained. There was a strange look of pity, too, upon his handsome features—although the other never noticed it, and it quickly passed away—and a tenderness, if not respect, in the firm tones of his reply.

"Do not be angry with me, sir," he said. "I would not have come thus unbidden, except that my business is somewhat pressing."

"It is not so immediate, I conclude, sir," answered the old man, still in wrath, "but that it can wait until I am dressed, and can go down to the library."

"In the library we may be overheard, uncle, and I have got that to say which, for your own sake, perhaps, had better be told where there is no chance of listeners."

"For *my* sake, sir? That is nonsense!" answered the old man, impatiently, but he drew back, nevertheless, and eyeing his nephew askance as he closed the door, drew a chair towards himself with trembling fingers, and sat down.

"I have something to do this morning—letters, papers—and besides, I am worse than usual," muttered he; "I can give you very little time."

"I shall not detain you five minutes, uncle. That is, if you take the same view of the affair that brings me here, as I do."

"Well, and what *does* bring you here, sir?"

"My love for your daughter Agnes, uncle."

Richard had expected an outburst of wrath, but the old man only smiled grimly. He seemed to experience almost a sense of

pleasure, and indeed he did so; such a feeling at least as one entertains when something befalls us which, though not welcome, is not nearly so unpleasant as was apprehended.

"Ah," said he, in the grating voice to which his nephew was so well accustomed. "Cousins should always love one another. But why interrupt my shaving to tell me this?"

"Don't sneer at me, uncle, or you will regret it." Again the quick sidelong look, and all the mockery of the ancient face giving place in a moment to suspicious fear.

"Yes, I repeat, you will be sorry for it—some day."

"Ah, I see, when you are away from home, and I begin to think over your virtues. Then I shall regret I snubbed you? Well, I am not a very sentimental person, Master Richard."

"No, uncle. You have some natural affection, however. You care for yourself and for your daughter. As for me, I know you rather dislike me than otherwise. You have never hesitated to show it. You have been so tyrannical and overbearing to me, that I sometimes liken Greycrags to a ship, in which I am the cabin-boy and you the captain. That hammock in yonder room seems to complete the metaphor. I say, Uncle Crawford, that you have behaved so brutally towards me from my very childhood, that it astonishes myself that I venture to address you as I am doing, although I am well aware that you have a very excellent reason for keeping your temper. Shall I tell you what it is?"

"Are you come here to insult me, you ungrateful boy?"

"No; although as to gratitude, I utterly

deny the debt. You have given me a home, indeed, but you have treated me like a dog, and especially at times when you knew such treatment would gall the most. Do you remember when you beat me in your daughter's presence, and she stopped you with her tears?"

"Why, that was six years ago!" exclaimed the old man, lifting up his long thin hands.

"Yes; dogs have good memories for those who beat them. Do you not remember six years ago, ay, and twenty-six? Come, sir, you are weak, you say, and very old, but you remember what took place six-and-twenty years ago, I am very sure. You shudder, uncle; you are cold. Permit me to close the window."

The old man would have sunk back, in his chair had its nature permitted of it, but as it

was, he sat propped up, but huddled together, with his eyes staring stonily before him upon the empty grate, like a man that has been hanged.

"For all that has come and gone yet, uncle, I wish, however, that you and I should be good friends. We are blood relations, and we are about to be also connected, I hope, by marriage."

The livid lips strove to speak and failed, but the bald white head shook, piteous to behold, in vehement protest.

"Well, I did not expect to get your consent at once. It is the point, indeed, on which I anticipated a discussion, but I have some tolerably convincing arguments too. If I had not, this interview would have ended long ago, you know—very probably, by your kicking me down-stairs."

The young man's eyes gleamed with malice;

the recital of the personal indignity that had been put upon him years ago, had driven all pity from his heart; it seemed to please him to picture to himself insults even which had never occurred.

"Now, to show you, Uncle Crawford, that I am not ignorant of the nature of the ground on which I am about to proceed, let me ask you whether it is not the fact that a considerable portion of your income dies with you, notwithstanding that you seem to live on your means just as though you were a government official, or a clergyman, or, let us say, a military or naval officer. Just so. This circumstance, therefore, made you desirous to secure for Agnes a husband of independent property, such as Mr. Carlyon. You need not be ashamed of it, for it was very natural. However, that scheme has turned out a failure."

"No, Richard. He and Agnes love one another."

"Excuse me, uncle. It is an immense pleasure to me to hear you talk so tenderly, to find you so easily affected, when, as you have just said, you are not a sentimental person; but let us, above all things, stick to facts—a very favourite phrase of yours, and justly so, since facts, and especially unpleasant ones, stick to us like burrs. The truth is then, Agnes does not love this man, and will never marry him. If you don't believe me, you can ask her yourself, and she will corroborate what I say. The argument of a 'previous engagement'—which I foresaw your sagacity would use—is therefore out of the question. The affections of your daughter are free, and I, sir, am here this morning to propose myself as her suitor."

"I have heard you talk like this before,

Richard," answered the old man, making a great effort to speak calmly, "and you have already had my answer. It cannot be."

"It *shall* be, Mr. Crawford, and it *must* be," returned the other, vehemently. "You will not surely force me to state that argument which you know lies in the back-ground, but which may remain there unstated for ever, if you only say 'Yes' to what I ask."

"Look here, Richard," appealed the old man, slowly, "I do not want to offend you. I would spare your feelings if I could; I would indeed."

"Thank you, uncle. You are always very considerate in that respect—but I interrupt you."

"The truth is, Richard,—and when I have stated it, I am sure you will not press this matter further—that my daughter, although entertaining an affectionate regard for you as

her cousin, has herself no wish to marry you. My consent, therefore, to your union, even if I gave it, would benefit you nothing. Agnes does not love you."

"I know it, uncle."

"What, then, is it possible you wish me to do violence to her inclinations?"

"Tush, tush. Like you, sir, I am not a sentimental person. If Mr. Carlyon were in my place, and your daughter only had an affectionate regard for *him*, you would strive to make it ripen into love, I think. You would exert a benign paternal influence. That is all I ask of you in my case."

"You are very young, Richard, and scarcely know what you ask," answered the other, persuasively. "When you have been this next voyage, and are more in a condition to know your own mind, then let us talk this matter over——"

"Yes, but in the mean time, let us by all means temporise, eh?" interrupted Richard, angrily. "If you are then bent upon holding your position, sir, it is necessary for me to bring up my reserve. I am afraid I shall inflict a story upon you. If I weary you beyond endurance, or if any portion of the narrative be too painful to be brought to a conclusion, you have only to say 'Stop' or 'Enough,' I shall then understand that further recital is unnecessary—that I have gained my point."

"You are talking riddles," said the old man, feebly, shading his eyes with his hand.

"If so, uncle, I think you possess the key. It is not a riddle, however, which I am about to narrate, but a biography."

CHAPTER IV.

AN OLD MAN'S SECRET.

"ALTHOUGH I of course remember nothing of my infant life," began Richard Crawford, "I have been so fortunate as to meet with a person who is well acquainted with it. Through that means I learn that so soon as I arrived in England, another nurse was substituted for the one in whose charge I had come from India, and who would have been certain, as I grew up, to talk to me of my dead parents, and to inform me of certain facts which it was to somebody's interest that I should never know. All the possessions which came over with me, including even articles of garment, were destroyed by this

person s direction. Nothing was left that might suggest to me in later years from whom I had sprung, except this locket."

"You are weaving a romance, Richard," observed the old man, casting a careless glance at what the other held in his hand. "I never to my knowledge beheld that trinket before."

"Perhaps not, uncle, yet you recognise this portrait." Richard turned back the little golden door, and showed the features of a handsome soldier-like man, very like those of Mr. Crawford himself, before years and sorrow and ill health had combined to sharpen them. "That's my father, is it not, sir, and your own brother?"

"It is very like him," said the old man, thoughtfully. "Yes," added he, after a moment's hesitation, "it is certainly he. It is curious enough that I should have been

ignorant of the existence of such a portrait, but I am glad to see it, however it was obtained. Poor Arthur!"

"This likeness, uncle, was taken just after his marriage, and a few days before he sailed for India for the last time."

"Somewhere about that period, as I should reckon," answered the old man, gazing upon the face attentively. "This was how he looked when I saw him last, newly married, happy, and yet beneath the shadow of death. Yes, it must have been near that time."

"It was *exactly* at that time, uncle. At the back of the picture there is a date—*and a name!*"

"It is a lie!" ejaculated the old man, shutting the locket close.

"That is not the way to disprove it," replied his nephew, coldly. "If you care to do so, you can read the inscription for your-

self. I was afraid that there would be portions of my story that must needs be painful to you. This is Chapter I. Shall we say 'Stop?' You are not yet convinced? It is necessary then to resume the narrative.

"I know that you never set a high value upon my intelligence, uncle, and I daresay you are very right; but all children who are not idiots, are observant, and I possessed my full share of sagacity so far. It is not love only which awakens interest; it is sometimes dislike. Where we cannot be contemptuous, but are compelled to hate, we keep a narrow watch upon our foes. I noticed several things concerning you in those early days, and all your cuffs did not put them out of my head. In the first place, instead of having a home like other people, we were always moving house. Wherever we went you feigned ill-health, (I never could see there was anything

the matter with you,) and shunned society as much as possible. When a stranger called you shrank from him, as though he had come to bring you some woful news. I know now that what you feared was recognition.

"In the second place, you entertained a morbid hatred of the sea, and all belonging to it. The reason, as I believe, which caused you to choose this house, independently of its complete seclusion, was that through some whim of him who built it, no window looks to seaward. The least allusion to the naval calling gave you extreme annoyance. You set yourself against my fancy for embracing it with a vehemence that was quite inexplicable. And, yet, notwithstanding all this, you exhibited, when off your guard, a surprising knowledge of nautical affairs. This of course I only understood lately, since I have myself become a sailor; but it struck me, even as a

boy, how strange it was that you should sleep in a hammock, and chew tobacco, like old Benbow."

Here Richard paused, as though expecting either some indignant outbreak, or specious explanation, but the old man did not speak, only shifted uneasily upon his chair. "It was not until last year," resumed his nephew, "and when I was two thousand miles away from English land, that I came into full possession of your secret."

Mr. Crawford groaned.

"You are your own tormentor, uncle," expostulated the young man, parenthetically, "and compel me to turn the rack, though I have no wish to hurt you. It was on deck at midnight in the tropic seas, that the revelation was made; the companion of my watch was a far older man than I, and had seen much sailor's service. He had been, it was

understood, in the Royal Navy himself, but had had to leave it through some breach of discipline; yet, perhaps, through a desire to avert any suspicion of such a fact—just as some men take an opposite course and shun the subject—he was for ever talking of naval matters, and particularly of the incidents of that great war, which was finished long before I was born, but of which you, uncle, were a contemporary. Our talk turned upon that matter on the occasion of which I speak. Youngster like, I was boasting of our national prowess, and of the valour which had ever distinguished our naval commanders. I averred that in equal fight we have never been beaten, and that in no case had any British Commander disgraced his flag. I knew, indeed, that there was the affair of Admiral Byng——"

"A most unjust and cruel sentence," in-

terposed the old man, vehemently; "a wicked act that has been long repented of by a mistaken country."

"Just so," observed the young man, drily; "but my companion spoke of other cases about which no such public stir was made. Three other British Admirals were brought before courts-martial during that long war, and all for cowardice. Of these three, one was acquitted; one reprimanded; and the third—whose case, although in some respects a hard one, was by far the worst, was 'relieved of his command,'—what, in the common soldier, is termed being 'drummed out.' He retained his pension, indeed, but without his rank; but, after a little time,—so at least my informant told me—he died, being of a very proud and haughty spirit, of a broken heart. I have reason to believe, however, that he is still alive, leading a secluded life, under a

feigned name. His real title (for he had had a knighthood conferred upon him for past services) was—I have forgotten; but if you will press that locket, uncle——"

"No, no," gasped the old man, placing the trinket in his own breast pocket; "you have said enough."

"Just as you please, uncle; you have only yourself to thank that you have heard so much. I have said, 'I have forgotten,' I will add, that I solemnly promise never to remember, or, at all events, not to use the recollection, if only you, on your part, accede to my request. I do not ask you to bestow your daughter, for your secret's sake, on one who will not prize the gift at its true value. I love her with all my soul; I will work for her, slave for her, serve any probation you may choose to appoint to prove myself worthy of her; but I must have her plighted word,

that when that is over she shall be mine. I am not unreasonable, but I am well resolved. Mark that, old man; I will have no subterfuge. From her own lips—not yours—I must hear the promise. If you refuse to use your influence as I have desired, or if you play me false, I will not spare you. No one in Mellor but shall know what a great man is living among them. All your precautions of these five long years shall count for nothing; this place of peace, which you imagined you had found at last, remote from all that knew you, shall know you more than any other. These drones, your neighbours, shall become a nest of hornets; the very children in the village street shall point at you; and, wherever you may go, thinking to find repose, you shall meet scandal and clamour. For a few days you may think you have evaded me; but rumour, noising all around, shall soon

let you feel that I have followed you, like fate."

As if goaded by the very bitterness of his own language, the young man's passion rose almost to madness; his dark face glowed with lurid fire, and he hissed his words out as though his tongue was very flame.

"But first of all," he went on, "your shame shall be made known to your own household. Your daughter, Agnes, she shall learn it first. Do you hear me, Admiral Sir Robert Vane?"

"Yes, yes; I hear you," answered the other, in hollow tones. "I am a very old man, and your own flesh and blood, sir; but you are not merciful. I cannot bear this talk much longer."

And, indeed, no more cadaverous and deathlike face was ever seen in living man, than that which Mr. Crawford now turned

upon his nephew. It had hitherto been studiously averted from him, and the expression of it both shocked and appalled the young man.

"I have nothing more to say, sir," answered he, with abated vehemence; "and my passion must be my excuse if I have been unnecessarily harsh. I am only afraid that you may underrate my fixed determination—which, however, I assure you, nothing can shake; that when I leave you, you will endeavour to persuade yourself that there is some loophole by which you may escape my importunities; or even, perhaps, that I may not be in possession of the facts which I have pressed upon your attention. When I tell you, however, that I have read that newspaper slip which lies in the secret drawer of yonder desk—you perceive at once, I see, how idle in that case must be such expectation. Well, sir, I will

not press you for an answer to-day. I am passionate, but I can also be patient. I can easily understand that this interview has severely shaken you. I would rather receive your promise of assistance when you are more like yourself. Will you give me my answer to-morrow?"

The old man's chin sank slowly forward, either from weakness, or in token of assent.

Richard chose to conclude it was the latter.

"To-morrow, then, uncle, you will answer me 'yes,' or 'no.'"

The young man rose, cast one long steady glance upon his uncle, huddled together as before, and with his grey head still resting upon his breast, and softly left the room.

CHAPTER V.

TO-MORROW.

For more than an hour after his nephew left him, Robert Crawford sat silent and motionless, helpless and prone, like a statue that has been thrown from its base. Then, feebly feeling for the locket, he drew it forth, and opened it; gazing once more at the picture, and sighing wearily, he unclasped it at the back, and there lay the inscription before him. "To Mary Caroline, from her loving husband, Arthur Vane;" and a date of more than a quarter of a century ago.

"'Did I remember twenty-six years back?' said he," murmured the old man. "He knows it all. Unnatural, cruel boy. Who

could have given him this? His nurse, Cubra, doubtless. They are in league together, and have undone me. She has access to my room, and has told him of what lies in yonder desk. I was a madman to keep it there—to keep that at all, the sight of which pierced my heart. Has he stolen it, I wonder, this traitor to his own flesh and blood?" Very slowly, and supporting himself by table and chair, he made his way to the standing desk. Clearing away a mass of papers within it, he touched a secret spring, and out darted a little drawer. In it was a printed slip—apparently an extract from some newspaper—and a small colourless globule. He took out the paper, and sat with it awhile before him, like one who waits for breath. Then he unfolded it and began to read. It was headed in large letters, "*Trial of Admiral Sir Robert Vane,*" and contained the usual dry bald

details of a naval court-martial, beginning with the statute under which the accused was charged. "Every person in the Fleet, who, through cowardice, negligence, or disaffection, shall in time of action withdraw, keep back, or not come into the fight or engagement, or shall not do his utmost to take or destroy every ship which it shall be his duty to engage, and to assist all and every of His Majesty's ships, or those of his allies, which it shall be his duty to assist or relieve, every person so offending, and being convicted thereof by the sentence of a court-martial, shall suffer death, *or such other punishment as the offence may deserve.*"

The witnesses were admirals and captains who had acted under the accused person in a certain engagement; and the point at issue was, "Did or did not Admiral Sir Robert Vane do his best to renew the battle which

had already gone in his favour?" The witnesses for the prosecution affirmed that he did not; the witnesses for the accused averred that a renewal of the fight was beyond his power.

At the conclusion of the evidence, the admiral read his defence, which began by stating that he had served his country seven-and-thirty years, during which he had been honoured more than once with marks of approbation from his sovereign. The sentence was as follows: "The court is of opinion that the charge of not having done his utmost to renew the said engagement, and to take or destroy every ship of the enemy, has been proved against the said Vice-Admiral Sir Robert Vane, and the court doth, therefore, adjudge him to be dismissed the service."

Party spirit ran very high at the time of this trial, which was, of course, instituted by

the Government, and the newspaper in question, being a Government one, bore very hardly upon the accused. It mentioned the cases of Byng, and Sir Robert Calder, and insisted upon it that the present was one far less deserving of indulgence: it hinted, that but for the last line of the statute (which was printed in italics) having been added in more merciful times, the accused would certainly have suffered death. Every imputation that malignity could suggest was heaped together against the unfortunate accused; but the charge of cowardice—as being likely to wound most deeply—was reiterated again and again. This part of the newspaper, viz., its comments on the trial, bore evidence of having been much oftener handled than the account of the trial itself. It was over these that the old man lingered now, as alive to every stab as when they were first rained upon him, when

he stood broken and disgraced before the world, a quarter of a century ago. *Litera scripta manet;* but, how infinitely more terrible is the permanency of that which is *printed,* since it stops not here nor there, but is promulgated everywhere, and at the same time. All England knew his shame upon the same day, and while he read, the old man felt that all England would be as full of it to-morrow as it was in that far-back-time. The perusal of those hateful words (probably long forgotten by him who had written them) always set those wounds bleeding afresh which Time had staunched; but now, with the menace of his nephew ringing in his ears, the torture was intolerable. Probably if the unfortunate admiral had sought in the Opposition journals only for *their* version of the affair, he would have found commiseration, if not comfort, instead of these venomous stings;

but he nourished the serpent in his bosom, as a proud man will, and it bit very deep. If physical pain is held to be some excuse for harshness of manner or ill-temper, how much more should have been this mental agony, the existence of which was not unknown to Richard!

"A cruel boy, a cruel, cruel boy," murmured the old man, again and again, as he sat gazing on the cruel words. "He would tell Agnes, too. He would not even spare the girl that he pretends to love. He called me coward, too, like this man here. And if I gave my daughter to him—if I persuaded her to give herself—they would speak truth. He shall never hold her in his power as he now holds me. No! No!"

This resolution seemed to give him strength. He rang his bell and bade the servant bring his meals up thither, since he did not feel well

enough to leave his room. He busied himself throughout the day in arranging certain papers in his desk. In the evening, "Tell Miss Agnes I will see her," said he; for even his daughter never ventured to seek his room unsummoned.

"You are ill, dear papa," said she, with anxious tenderness, directly she caught sight of his weary face.

"No, love; much the same as usual. I have been arranging my affairs, and that has tired me. You know what a sad hand I am at business."

"But why not send for me to help you, then?"

"You could not help me in this matter, Agnes. No. You could not. Where is Richard?"

"Like yourself, he is not well. He was not at dinner; he has one of his bad head-aches.

I am afraid you are angry with him, dear papa; and, indeed, it was very wrong of him to come up here. But he is really scarce himself at times, poor fellow."

"You pity him, then?"

"Of course, papa. I fear he feels the effects of that sunstroke still. He is so very odd at times."

"But you do not love him? You still have no affection towards him deeper than a cousin's? You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"That is well, dear child." He took her little hand within his own, and stroked it tenderly. "You must promise me that when I am dead and gone you will never marry Richard."

"Certainly I never shall, papa; but why do you ask such a thing? I wish you would let me send for Mr. Carstairs."

"No, dear; no; I am as well now as I shall ever be. But life to me is worse than uncertain, and nothing should be put off."

They sat together side by side, without speaking, and upon the other side of the old man, unseen by her, sat Death.

"Is it true that Mr. Carlyon has left Mellor, Agnes?"

"Yes, papa."

"Left it 'for good,'—I mean. Is it certain that nothing would bring him back?"

The young girl blushed and hesitated.

"You may trust in me, love; tell me all. Does he not love you?"

"I cannot tell; I am not sure, papa."

"Do you love *him?*"

"I can never marry him," answered she, steadfastly.

"It is a matter of religion, then, that separates you?"

"I cannot say that, papa. But perhaps, if we thought alike respecting religious matters, —but I do not know, indeed."

"Don't weep, my child, don't weep. You have, doubtless, acted rightly. There is something—what is it—in the Bible about 'choosing the better part.' I do not blame you, if I ever did. It is well to give up all for God. Yes, yes," here he paused for a little, sighing heavily; then resumed: "You will not be penniless when I am gone, Agnes; there will be more than you thought—that is," added he, observing her pained look, "more than others have imagined. I know you never think about such matters. You are a good girl; and God will never forsake you. Kiss me, darling. You must go now, for I am getting tired. No: I shall want nothing more till morning. Nothing more." There was a pathos in those last words which might

have moved Richard himself could he have heard them.

"God bless you, dear papa," said Agnes, kneeling down and looking yearningly into his wan face.

"That is right, darling. Perhaps He will, since it is you who ask it. Good night, good night."

Mr. Crawford was once more alone, except for that grim attendant whom he had himself summoned, before he sent for his daughter, lest she should persuade him from his purpose to her own hurt. He once more songht his desk, and opened the secret drawer; the little globule was no longer there, but only the newspaper slip. This he tore into a hundred minute shreds, and threw them on the hearth. Then he took out his watch.

"A few hours hence, and there will be no more apprehensions, no more disgrace," said

he. "To-morrow he will have his answer—to-morrow! To-morrow! What will to-morrow be for me?"

* * * * *

In the morning, when the servant came to call the old man, he was lying in his hammock, very white and quiet, as usual, but with a ghastlier look upon his face than even it had ever worn before. The sentence of the court-martial had not been so humane as the report had stated. It was death, although the execution had been so long deferred. Those thin stern lips had spoken their last words, but to one of those who, summoned by the servants' terrified clamour, surrounded that strange death-bed, they still gave their dumb reply:—

"No, would-be traitor, no!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT RICHMOND.

It is autumn, and deep in autumn; still, all "the quality" have not yet fled from town. They have abode within its scorching walls through June and July, amid the dust of the roaring streets. They have borne the burthen and heat of the bustling day, when it lay in their power to enjoy the summer coolness of their woods and streams. And now, though the trees are putting off their green, and enclosing themselves in their most glorious garment of all—their Joseph's coat of many colours—they still delay, as their fathers did, who "preferred the smell of a link-boy's torch to all the scents of garden or field." It is to

be stated, *per contra,* however, that these worshippers at Fashion's shrine have not withdrawn their patronage from the country altogether. Once a week, or even, during its palmy time, bi-weekly, these idolators have emerged from the interior of their grilling brazen bull, and sought the glades of Windsor, the banks of Greenwich, or the wooded heights of Richmond. And now, as the latest period of their final departure draws nigh, those who have not already fled, congregate like migrating birds, and take these swallow flights into the country more than ever.

There is a party of such birds of fashion, the females full-feathered, and magnificently hued, the men not so gorgeous, yet with a certain nicety of apparel quite as striking, gathered together now at one of those Richmond palaces, where you sit and eat of the best that art can provide, while nature minis-

ters of her fairest to the eye. The popping of champagne corks, the chink of glasses, the murmur of pleasant talk, the laughter of fair women, flow forth from the open windows like streams of music into the sea of harmony without, where wood and water are vying with one another in the great Even-song. The birds are caroling from park and meadow, whence uproarious mirth and robust ditties come mellowed by distance; and with the cool breezes from the river, are upborne the even pulses of the oar and all the cheery sounds of that crowded highway. Presently, their feast concluded, the revellers come forth into the terraced garden, and there is not a dame so churlish as to forbid her cavalier to light the grateful weed. In twos and threes they promenade upon the sloping lawn, or on the broad gravelled walks, or lounge upon the garden seats, or lean upon the balustrades and

watch the glorious picture that is spread beneath them; the river winding slow, as though over-burthened with its freight of home-bound pleasure-seekers; the wooded banks, and path-pierced meadows; and the blue hills that close the scene.

Two of these loungers are remarkable; the one is a lady of great beauty, tall as Minerva, imperious as Juno, but very well knowing how to be tender, too, as you may see by the soft glances which she casts ever and anon at her companion, and by the soft tones in which she addresses him; the other is a man near half a foot higher than the others of his sex about him, and very powerfully made.

"Yes, indeed, I should be most ungrateful if I was *not* pleased, Mr. Carlyon," replied she, in answer to some question; "so are we all, I'm sure. I never enjoyed a day at Richmond more."

"That's well. I am very glad."

"You don't *look* glad," returned she, in a tone of playful discontent; "but then you are always melancholy."

"Am I?"

"Yes." Her voice sank very low; each had had a hand upon the balustrade a little apart; but now they were touching. "If I did not know you *so* well, Mr. Carlyon,—you smile, but you are more easily read than you imagine,—I should say that it was the day's closing scene, the influence of the evening—"

"That's you," interrupted Carlyon, smiling.

"Tush, nonsense," continued she, pressing his hand reprovingly; "if I had any power over you, I should make you cheerful, happy. I don't like to see my friends—persons I have a genuine regard for—so hipped and serious. You are worse than ever to-night. One would think you were frightened by that

foolish Captain Plasher's remark about our being thirteen at dinner, and how that one of us would die within the year."

"Yes; but your mother put him right, you know; she said that the proverb ran 'would die or else would marry.' Marriage is better than death, is it not, Edith?"

"Well, really, that depends. What a disagreeable man that is to haunt us in that manner."

Carlyon turned sharply round, only in time to see a young man sauntering slowly away with a cigar in his mouth.

"Never mind," continued she; "he is gone now; oh! pray don't meddle with him; I do hate a scene."

"He is indebted to you for a whole skin," rejoined Carlyon, quietly. "If I have a prejudice, it is against eaves-dropping. At the same time, the poor wretch is not without an

excuse. Where Edith Treherne is, there is always a temptation to draw nigh."

"Now you talk nonsense; what a wayward will you have, to be so serious when others are enjoying themselves, and to jest, when you ought to—be—that is—but here's mamma."

A stately dame bore down upon them at this critical juncture.

"Dearest Edith, it is getting late, and I have ordered the carriage. My dear Mr. Carlyon, we have a seat to offer you."

"But not to offer Red Berild, I conclude," returned he, smiling; "thank you very much, but I ride home. Must you go so soon, Mrs. Treherne? When you and yours leave us the party is broken up indeed."

"You are engaged, however, to dine with us to-morrow, remember, Mr. Carlyon; although it will be a bathos after your charming

treat of to-day, I'm sure. In five minutes we shall start, Edith; indeed, directly I have found Julia. I can't think where that little puss has got to."

Mrs. Treherne could make a very tolerable guess, however, for she had a sharp eye for both daughters' movements; if a glance of that organ ever expressed "make the most of your time," it did so, when she parted with her eldest hope in professed pursuit of her second-born.

"Then you won't come home with us!" murmured the beauty, plaintively. "I do think you like that horse of yours better than——" she hesitated, then concluded her sentence with "mamma."

"Well really, my dear Miss Treherne, I never should have ventured upon comparing their relative merits," answered Carlyon, smiling. "But you must allow that Red

Berild is more devoted to *me* than your lady mother is. That goes for a great deal, you know."

"People don't always know how much they are esteemed, Mr. Carlyon."

"Do you think so?" returned the other, musing. "That is not the case with love, however, is it? If a woman sincerely loves a man he always sees it, does he not?"

"I think so; that is, unless he is wilfully blind."

"You are right, Miss Treherne, as usual."

"What makes you sigh, Mr. Carlyon?"

"Ah, that is a long story, and our time is short. Ask me any question but that, and I will answer you."

"Good," returned the girl, fixing her fine eyes upon his own; "what is it, then, that you always carry in your breast pocket? We have often laughed—at least, spoken of it, at

home; it is too large for a note-book, or a miniature; what is it?"

"I did not give you credit for so much curiosity about me, Miss Treherne. Here is the subject of your wonder: a plain book in a plain binding."

"Why, it is the New Testament!" ejaculated the young lady.

"Ought it then to have been the old one?" returned Carlyon, coldly.

"No, of course not. But, excuse me, I was a little surprised at your carrying about with you such a book at all. Cousin Archibald, whom you met at the club, told us—at least, we had the impression——"

"That I was an infidel," interposed Carlyon, quietly. "Well, so I am."

"How shocking!" returned the beauty. "How very naughty of you." And she tapped him lightly on the arm with her lace-

fringed parasol. "You must have been in very bad hands, sir, when you were young. That is, I mean, when you were a boy. I will ask my uncle the Dean to give you a talking to?"

"Your uncle the Dean!" Carlyon burst into such laughter as quite astonished some neighbouring knots of well-bred folk.

"Well, I'm glad to hear you laugh, although it need not have been quite so loud," said she, smiling. "Now—for I am still curious—let me have the book to hold. Will you?"

Carlyon hesitated for a moment, then put the volume into her dainty hand.

"Why, there's nothing in it!" said she; "absolutely nothing."

"That is not your uncle's view, Miss Edith."

"I don't mean that. I mean that there is no name, Mr. Carlyon," returned she, gravely:

"the title-page is blank. Who gave it to you?"

"I did not promise to tell you all my secrets, Miss Treherne. But why do you ask? Does it look like a *gage d'amour*—this book?"

"Well, no," answered she, doubtfully; "though some girls give very funny things for keepsakes. But there, I dare say you have quite a collection of such."

"Not I, indeed, Miss Treherne. No girl cares for me: and for the matter of that, no human creature—only Berild."

"Don't say that, Mr. Carlyon," returned she, softly. "I am sure that I—that is, mamma and I—care for you very, very much. She is beckoning to us yonder. Won't you take our vacant seat? *won't* you?"

"Not this evening, Edith"—he drew her fingers on to his arm and led her away—

"how your hand trembles! The air is getting chill; I shall never forgive myself if you have caught cold."

"I am not chilly, thank you, dear Mr. Carlyon," murmured she, tenderly. "We shall see you to-morrow." Then, in her usual cold and cynical tone she added, "Mr. Carlyon will not go home with us, mamma. He prefers his horse, as usual, to our company, or that of anyone else."

A few minutes more of handshakings and conventional expressions of goodwill, and all Carlyon's guests, in roomy chariots and snug broughams, had rolled away. It was felt that it was a bathos to remain after lovely Edith Treherne and her scarcely less beautiful sister had departed.

Carlyon had known Edith three years before as the belle of the London season; her place had been usurped by others, younger,

if not lovelier than herself, and perhaps her mother looked upon an untitled country gentleman with some two thousand a year in land with more favourable eyes than heretofore. At all events, Mrs. Treherne, having satisfied herself that his melancholy did not proceed from pecuniary losses, had welcomed him to town with unexpected kindness and hospitality. He knew but few families in London, and in those few weeks had grown proportionably intimate with this good lady and her daughters, and those who were introduced to him through their means.

His guests to-day had been almost all friends of the Trehernes; and it was understood among them that a match between Edith and himself was by no means an improbable event. Still, the cautious mother had dropped no word of it to any of them; on the contrary, had expressed her opinion that

Mr. Carlyon was so strange a person—so very "peculiar in his views," too, that it was hardly likely that any girl should take a fancy to him. Her friends, of course, translated this to mean that Carlyon was a difficult fish to hook; but she did not mind that one pin. She couldn't help people "talking," but she would not permit of the existence of a peg, upon which they might hang the scandal that her Edith had been jilted. She loved her daughter—this practical, worldly old lady—after her own fashion, very dearly; but she had no intention that she should be the bride of Heaven until, at least, all hope was over of earthly suitors.

Although, as we have said, knowing but few families in town, Carlyon had a pretty large male acquaintance, chiefly men from his own county. These men were not school or college friends; his mother's love had pre-

cluded his going to a public school; she could not bear to part for any length of time with the only being to whom she could cling, and so he had been sent to a small seminary in the neighbourhood of home. His father's selfishness had refused the expenses of a university education. These men were, therefore, mainly acquaintances of the hunting-field. They all liked him, and were glad to see him in town; their prejudices upon the score of his opinions were not valid there; London society is very charitable, and "the clubs" have open arms for every one who doesn't cheat at cards. The conversation that sometimes—once in a year, perhaps,—turns upon spiritual matters in the "smoking-room," (generally late at night,) exhibits religious liberty upon its broadest ground. If an honest country parson could only be smuggled in quietly to listen to it, how it would open

his eyes; not so much in horror, but in astonishment. Between him and the man of the world there is a great gulf fixed, not of fire, but of ice; each makes believe that it will bear—that communication is, in fact, established; but neither ventures to cross. It is not to be expected that the latter will budge a step; if they are ever to meet, it is the business of the Royal (and Ecclesiastical) Humane Society's man to make the attempt.

Well, Carlyon's club was glad to see its country member; the sporting set (with whom he was best acquainted) introduced him to the fast set. He saw a good deal of what unphilosophic persons call "Life," in a little time. He had seen it before, of course. All Englishmen of good means do see it, sooner or later. Really moral men, whether philosophers or otherwise, are as rare as respectable folks are plentiful. The Josephs are few, the

Joseph Surfaces many. Some say the former are not to be found at all, which seems to have been the view of some very wise and good teachers, such as Jeremy Taylor. But it is only the heartless, the sinners in cold blood, who pursue dissipation for any great length of time; passionless vice is the longest lived of all. Carlyon had never been a debauchee in his youth, and licence had no greater charms for him in his middle age. Still, he wished to escape from himself, and was in no wise particular about the means. He never gambled, however. There was very high play among some of the men he knew, and there is nothing that offers so strong a temptation to one that would forget both the past and the future as high play; but he never touched dice or cards. If he lost, would he not be robbing her to whom he had left all he had?

Thus time went on with John Carlyon,

among his new friends—for almost all were new, except Red Berild, who was stabled near to his own lodgings in the Albany—much as it goes on with many a man who has a month's holiday to spend in London; only Carlyon had already spent two months there, and (so it seemed to him) had ten months yet to spend. He scarcely noted time, save by its loss. Another week gone, or a day, such as he would never see again, was his occasional reflection. Without hope or fear as to the future, the material approximation to his life's end made itself felt within him. By nature a very unselfish man—as men go—his mind, like a bent sapling, still obstinately reverted to himself, notwithstanding that he strove to bind it to other things. We may, and often do, love others better than ourselves (as Carlyon certainly did); we may even merge ourselves in them, and lose our very

identity therein for a season; but, after all, there is nothing that interests a poor human creature so unintermittingly and for such long continuance as his own self. Carlyon often caught himself musing, not, indeed, exactly upon his own fate, as upon what would happen in the world in relation to him, after he was gone. He smiled bitterly to think what sister Meg would have to say about him when the contents of his will were made known, and how Jedediah would run through that paltry five hundred pounds, and never fill a glass to his uncle's memory. If these relatives had really stood in need of his money, he would certainly not have disposed of it as he had done. As it was, how good a use would Agnes make of it! There was no fear, too, of wealth spoiling *her*. And yet it would give her pleasure, since it would afford her larger opportunities of doing good.

He could not, however, strive to please her in that which he knew would have made her happiest. Her own apprehensions with regard to that parting gift of hers had been fulfilled; he regarded the little volume she had sent him, so reverently, for her sake, that he almost always carried it about with him; but he would have preferred it to have been any other book. On its own account it was unwelcome and even repulsive, for he saw in it the material bar which had kept him and her asunder. It was terrible to him to think of that. Hopeless as his love for her was, the thought of death was hideous, inasmuch as it must needs separate them for ever. In other respects, the contemplation of it was more curious than painful. The notices of matters to take place at a far-distant date, when he should no longer be above the earth but under it, affected him sharply; even a friend's casual

mention of some plans for the ensuing summer would overcast his brow. That he had never felt himself stronger, or in more excellent health, only intensified the strangeness of all this. Such feelings, although frequent, were, however, evanescent enough. His life, as has been said, went on much like any other idle man's. He lounged, and rode, and read, in his usual desultory way; he feasted, nay he flirted willingly, though aimlessly enough, with the beautiful Edith. Hers was a heart not easily to be broken, and there was scarcely anybody but himself now left in town for the poor girl to practise upon. Why should not she be gratified with the idea that he was being enthralled? She certainly did not love him; and when he was dead, if the rumour of there having been any *tendresse* between them should get abroad, it would only make her the more interesting. He would take

care that matters should never go so far as to compel her to put on mourning, which she had confided to him did not become her. She enjoyed those little dinners at Richmond immensely, and so did he, did he not? Well, asking himself this question, as he strode up and down the broad gravelled terrace after his guests were gone, he could scarcely answer, "Yes." Through most of his life he had been accustomed to be alone, but he had never felt so solitary, so friendless, so desolate, as now, with the congratulations and compliments of those fair-weather friends ringing in his ears, and the soft breathings of that lovely girl still warm upon his cheek.

Why had she insisted upon bringing forth the skeleton of his closet, demanding, like some foolish princess in a fairy tale, the keys of his secret chamber, when he had only wished to give her the best of what he had.

Why had he let her take that precious book within her hand; she—with her "How shocking!" and "What a naughty man to be an Infidel!"—was it not a sacrilege to let her do it? And, on the other hand, who was *he*, to play fast and loose with this poor girl, as though his fellow-creatures were his puppets? Was his life, just because it was fated to be a short one, to swallow up all others while it lasted, and make them of no consequence? Was not his morbid mind compelling him to selfish and unworthy acts, which threatened to leave behind him an evil memory? It was surely worth while to look to that if to nothing else!

Thus perturbed in mind, the doomed man strode up and down the hotel garden, amid the thinning groups of pleasure-seekers, each with their hidden care, but none with one so heavy as his own, or, at least, which sat so

heavily. Their light talk and easily moved mirth jarred upon his ear, and he descended to a lower terrace, from whence could still be seen the winding river, now silent and pale in the moonlight, and the sleeping field curtained with silver mist; and after him, like his shadow, moved the man that had aroused Edith's wrath awhile ago, by hovering near them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DOCTOR'S DIFFICULTY.

ALTHOUGH poor Mr. Crawford had been found in his hammock cold as a stone in a sling, Mr. Carstairs had at once been sent for; and notwithstanding that he knew his professional services were not needed, the good-natured little man had hurried to Greycrags, for the sake of her whom the dead man had left alone in the world. Of course, his first visit was paid to the chamber of death. The servants, weeping from the sudden strangeness of the event rather than from sorrow, unless, perhaps, some of them were touched for their young mistress's sake, were directed to retire—except Cubra, who had

been so long the old man's confidential attendant—and the doctor stood by the dead man's side alone. There lay the fellow creature who had been his host but lately, and his patient for some trifling ailment only two days before. He had been an old man, it was true; but he had had no immediate warning of this fate; the gaunt form was wan and thin enough, but so it had always been since Mr. Carstairs had known him. There was nothing to account for so sudden a failure of the vital powers.

"Poor old man!" That was the only piece of sentiment in which the little doctor, accustomed to see death claim the aged, permitted himself to indulge. He was musing upon what he should say to the unhappy girl that was awaiting him below; what scheme he should propose to her for her future life, for he felt that he was

the only counsellor she had, when something about the lips of the corpse attracted his attention.

"Draw the curtain still more back, Cubra," said he, hastily. "Give me all the light you can."

He bent over the dead man's face—already like the work of a sculptor's chisel—and then drew back, with something like horror depicted on his own.

Any one who had been looking in at that bedroom window would also have shrunk aghast from another face—that of Cubra herself, who was staring forth upon the lawn without, with cheeks of leaden hue, and eyes rolling in their sockets.

"Do you hear me, Cubra? more light," reiterated the doctor.

"Yes, Massa Carstairs;" she obeyed his mandate, yet did not turn her gaze towards

him; but her ears were strained to catch his every word and movement.

"How strange!" he murmured. Then, passing to the mantel-piece, whereon stood a couple of bottles, he took out their corks and smelt at their contents. They were both from his own dispensary.

"Cubra," said he, carelessly, "did your poor master take any other medicines than those I used to send him?"

"Never, Massa Carstairs, never. Poor massa never liked medicine."

"Now, look at me, Cubra; you knew your master's ways better than anybody. Are you quite sure that he did not keep by him, in his desk, or in a drawer, anything to stop pain—he suffered from toothache, you know, for instance—now, try and recollect; was there no box or bottle from which he used to take something to relieve it?"

Cubra shook her head. "No; she was 'certain sure' such was not the case. Massa did not mind pain, like other folks."

Mr. Carstairs knew that this was true; for the old man, although it was his whim to be considered more of an invalid than he really was, had been a very stoic with respect to physical pain.

Mr. Robert Augustus Carstairs, F.R.C.S., had his weak professional side—a tendency not uncommon among the faculty to assign all ailments to one particular disease, and to exaggerate the effects thereof—but he was both a sagacious and a scientific man. Affecting to be convinced by Cubra's replies, he determined to ask a question or two elsewhere respecting the matter which had so much moved him. It was impossible to get any information out of this black domestic. She was faithful, no doubt, and it was to be hoped

to a greater degree than any white woman, for she was certainly far stupider. If the late Mr. Crawford had really kept secreted about him any such thing as he (the doctor) suspected, it was in the highest degree unlikely that Cubra should have been made his confidante. Mr. Carstairs descended to the drawing-room, where he found poor Agnes alone. She was very sad and pale; but her tears were not falling now. She had been praying to One who wipes tears away from all eyes, and had found present comfort. Good people, as a rule (with the exception of utterly heartless folks), weep least when Heaven takes away those nearest to them. She could not trust herself to speak much; but she had ears to hear all that was necessary to be said.

The little doctor took her hand in his with fatherly tenderness, and addressed to her a few unconventional words of sympathy.

"Can I see your cousin, dear Miss Agnes?" inquired he; "for it must rest with him, of course, to arrange——"

"No," replied she, shaking her head. "Richard is quite unable for such a task. I never saw him so utterly unnerved as when —" Here she broke down a little; then resumed, "No, my dear Mr. Carstairs, I must trust wholly to your kindness in this matter."

"I am sorry," mused the doctor; "not," added he, hastily, "that I grudge either time or trouble in such a service, my dear young lady, but because I had certain questions to ask of him—mere matters of form it is true —but which must be more or less distressing to a daughter, respecting your poor father's death."

She bowed her head, in sign of her willingness to hear him.

"Did Mr. Crawford suffer, to your know-

ledge, from any chronic or other pain, such as might have induced him to take opiates—or even stronger palliatives?"

"Certainly not. I should say that my poor dear father—considering his great age—was signally free from such maladies. He never had even so much as an attack of rheumatism."

"He suffered, however, much at times, did he not, from depression of spirits?"

"Yes."

"Was that depression hypochondriacal, or resulting from some sufficient cause; I do not of course seek to pry into the nature of it, but was there a cause?"

"There was."

"Was that cause likely to have increased with years, or to have diminished?"

"To have diminished."

At this Mr. Carstairs looked sharply up

into the grave young face; but nothing save truth was to be read therein.

"There was no immediate apprehension, then, hanging over your father, such as, combined with this depression, or independent of it, might have affected his reason?"

"Oh, sir, he spoke to me last night—as wisely, kindly—" here she hesitated; "we had a long talk together, and little did I imagine that it was to be the last between us."

"Forgive me the pain I see I am inflicting, dear Miss Agnes, but, during that conversation did he mention nothing of importance which was also novel, and such as, dwelling upon a mind already enfeebled, might go far even to overthrow it."

"We spoke of an important matter, but it was one on which we had talked before. There were no secrets—none—between myself and him."

"Did you agree on that in which you talked, or was there a difference of opinion?"

"We agreed."

"Nothing then has taken place, to your knowledge, since I saw your father last, to give him any sudden mental shock?"

"No."

"Nothing to disturb or distress him?"

"Richard had an interview with him yesterday morning; I suppose, about my cousin's going to sea. They were not on such good terms with one another as I could have wished—as I wish now more than ever. But my father was never put out by any disagreement with Richard, and he did not even mention that there had been such when I talked with him in the evening."

"And is Mr. Richard absolutely too ill to see me?"

"Yes, Mr. Carstairs. I am very anxious

about my cousin. At times—and particularly of late—I have almost thought that he has not entirely recovered from that sunstroke which he received when upon the coast of Africa. I am not alarmed, except for himself, you will understand," added she, hastily, perceiving the doctor's grave looks, "but I do think his position precarious."

"What you have told me, my dear Miss Agnes, is only one more reason added to those which have already occurred to me, why you should not remain at Greycrags."

"Oh, Mr. Carstairs; could I leave *him?*" cried she, with a piteous glance in the direction of her father's room.

"You can be of no use to him more, dear girl. You will, of course, attend the funeral, if you feel it well to do so; but, in the mean time, you should not be here. I have already secured you rooms at Widow Marcon's, at the

Brae Cottage, if you will consent to remove thither. She is a good motherly person, and has herself experienced a recent sorrow that will make her sympathise with yours. With your cousin in such a state as you describe—independently of other very valid reasons—it is only right, nay, necessary, that you should move thither at once. You will have nothing to reproach yourself with, I hope, in leaving all matters here in my hands. Cubra will of course accompany you. Come, will you give me your promise, like a good girl?"

"I will do what you will, Mr. Carstairs, upon one condition. Tell me what has killed my poor dear father."

"*Killed* him, my child!—for I must be your father now—how ever can you use such words? He died of that commonest disease of all, old age. But, since it was so very sudden, it was my duty to ask those questions.

Richard, if he had been himself, would have understood the necessity of them at once, although they seem strange to *you*."

For serious, systematic, kindly lying, there is nobody that approaches your honest medical man. He will assure the husband (with the best intentions, and for his physical good, mind you), lying upon the bed, which his science tells him he will never leave with life, of returning strength; he will bid the wife, worn out with watching by his side, and to whom one refreshing sleep is priceless, to be of good cheer, for that there is healthiest hope. And, used to these pious frauds, Mr. Carstairs let fall his words as though he were dropping drops from the phial of the very quintessence of truth, and Agnes Crawford believed them.

"When we poor mortals have struggled on to eighty years," continued the doctor,

"death can scarcely be said to come upon us unawares. If its approach be sudden, so much the better—that is, if we are only prepared for it in a spiritual sense: with the young and the unprepared, alas! it is very different."

Cunning Mr. Carstairs walked to the window as though he did not wish his countenance to be perused. His object was to interest his hearer in something else—no matter if it was itself distressing—than that with which her mind was oppressed; to lift, if but for a few minutes, the dull weight of that desolation which sits upon a mourner's soul and crushes the life-springs. His attempt succeeded. Agnes, always solicitous for others, inquired of whom he spoke.

"Of John Carlyon."

"What of him?" cried Agnes, starting to her feet. "He is not ill, I trust; not

dying — oh, no, surely, sir, he is not dying?"

The doctor had overshot his mark. With clasped hands, and suddenly tearful eyes, the young girl stood before him the very picture of despair. In closing one channel of grief he had opened the flood-gates of a deeper woe.

"Mr. Carlyon is not in any immediate danger, that I know of, my dear young lady. But his is not a good life. I mean, he has a disease—heart complaint—which may carry him off at any moment, and with which it is not to be expected that he can live long."

"How long have you known this, Mr. Carstairs?"

"Not long. Only since that day when he saved your life upon the sands."

"Oh, would to heaven that I had known it, too," cried Agnes, passionately. "I might

have tried more earnestly to move him than I did. He is not fit to die, doctor."

"Few of us are, my dear young lady. Yet he has a noble soul, and a kind heart."

"He has, I know it. That such a one should be lost is only the more terrible."—Here she paused a moment. "Does Mrs. Newman—does his sister know of his sad state? I mean, as to health."

"Yes; I thought it my duty to acquaint her with it, in order that some reconciliation might be effected. But she would not move in the matter. She said that she had washed her hands of him. She is a hard woman. Carlyon once remarked that she had made a religion for herself out of the worst parts of Christianity, and certainly she is one of those who make its professions repulsive. He has gone to London, and will not return to Woodlees any more. They will never meet

again in this world, those two—be calm, my dear young lady; be like yourself, and bear with patience what God Himself permits to be. I cannot, I dare not, leave you in this state. You will come to the Brae, like a good girl. I have a close carriage at the door."

He spoke to her as though she were a child, and, like a child, she listened, and obeyed him.

"I suppose you are right, doctor," returned she, feebly; "as I am sure you are kind. Yes, I will go with you. But first let me take leave of *him* for the last time."

"No, my dear young lady," replied the doctor, firmly; "that must not be. It may seem cruel, but I am only doing what he would wish could those cold lips speak. Think of him as you saw him last."

"I understand, sir. Alas, alas!"

"A good girl, a wise and dutiful girl. I

will ring for Cubra, and she will get ready such things as you may require. Mrs. Marcon quite expects you both."

"You will see Richard, sir, before you go."

"True, I had forgotten him; I will look to him at once."

"Tell him, please, with my kindest love, Mr. Carstairs—his cousin's love—that I do not feel equal to wishing him good-bye to-day. In a day or two—after the——"

"Yes, yes, I will manage all that," returned the doctor. "Of course you cannot see him. Here is Cubra—that's well."

The black woman put a key into his hand, and whispered a few words, unobserved by her young mistress, who lay back on the sofa with closed eyes, conscious of nothing save her bereavement.

"I will ring for them when they are to come up," resumed he, in the same low voice.

Get together what your mistress will require for the next few days. You must go with her to Widow Marcon's at once. The sooner she gets from this house the better. Where is Mr. Richard?"

"He is gone out, sir."

"Gone out! Where has he gone?"

"God A'mighty knows. Gone for a long walk, he said; his head was bad. He take poor Massa's death to heart so much."

Mr. Carstairs nodded, and left the room.

"That's strange," muttered he. "He was in the house when I came, for I saw him at his bed-room window. I wonder why he doesn't wish to see me." Once more, the doctor sought the chamber of death; once more bent over the dead man—and, as he did so, his countenance grew graver than ever. "This is horrible," murmured he. "It would kill her to think that he killed himself,

and would benefit nobody. But if there has been foul play—yet that is impossible." He rang the bell, and summoned the man-servant, while he set his seal upon the desk, wherein he knew lay the dead man's will. For Mr. Crawford had been more communicative to the doctor of late than to any other person. Then the chamber was again given up to those who minister the last rites to poor humanity.

Mr. Carstairs saw the carriage depart containing the unhappy Agnes and her attendant; then followed close behind it on his pony.

"At all risks, I will spare her if I can," murmured he. "It will be time enough to make a stir when the will is read, and if anybody but herself is found to derive benefit from the old man's death. I wonder why Richard would not see me."

CHAPTER VIII.

TOWED ASTERN.

MONTHS have passed away since the events recorded in the last chapter. In the will of Mr. Crawford no other name save that of his daughter was mentioned. Richard's little property had been somewhat improved while in his uncle's care, and was found more than sufficient for his own very simple needs. He had had an interview with Mr. Carstairs after his uncle's funeral, in which he had behaved with unexpected calmness and good sense. He was very solicitous about his own state of health, and seemed to be well aware that there was danger with respect to his mind. He owned that he still felt the effects of the sun-

stroke received two years ago, although only on occasions of excitement. He spoke of his uncle with respect, but without any hypocritical regret. He felt sorry, he said, now that Mr. Crawford was dead, that they had not been better friends; but confessed that they never had got on agreeably together. Any lingering suspicion which the doctor may have entertained of "foul play" in the matter of the old man's death was entirely done away with, and whatever views he still entertained with respect to the untimeliness of his decease, he attached no blame to Richard. He was much ashamed of himself at having ever harboured so groundless a prejudice, and felt a kindly interest in one he had so gravely wronged in thought. He cordially approved of the young man's proposition to mix with the world for a little before going to sea again, and Richard accordingly set out for London.

Agnes was greatly pleased at the unexpected good sense exhibited by her cousin. When he came to bid her good-bye, he showed no trace of that wilfulness and passion he had been used to exhibit, and which had caused her to regard him of late (although she did not own it to herself) with less of affection than alarm. Perhaps, out of regard for her recent bereavement, perhaps, because he felt that he had really no chance of winning her heart, he made no direct allusion to his love for her, and even the hint he dropped was so slight that it did not strike her with any force until long afterwards. He said that he felt it was better for him to leave Mellor for the present, but that he should see her again—she might depend on that—before he undertook another voyage. When she spoke of writing to him in the meantime, he answered, "No, Agnes; I had rather there was silence between

us for the present. I shall hear about you, and of everything you do—that is, Mr. Carstairs has promised to let me know." He was manifestly making a gallant effort to shake off his hopeless passion, and at parting she was more deeply moved, or seemed to be so, than he. She mentally blessed the kindly little doctor for his good offices, which, while releasing her from a most embarrassing attachment, had left her an affectionate well-wisher and friend in her only cousin.

So Richard Crawford, like John Carlyon, was swallowed up in the great world of London, where men do, even more than elsewhere, what is right in their own eyes; and Agnes was left in her little world at Mellor—shrunk to small dimensions indeed by their secession—at Widow Marcon's cottage, "The Brae."

A very pretty little dwelling it was, on the

very margin of the bay, down to which the small garden, with its couple of tiny terraces and Lilliputian arbour, sloped. A toy palace, fit for a queen (of Titania's nature,) with a very limited court. The widow, finding herself but ill provided for at her husband's death, had taken the place with a speculative eye. Such a bijou of a villa residence could not fail to attract some elderly spinster or widow like herself, or even two sisters (if they did not mind occupying the same sleeping apartment, for there was but one "best bedroom")—it was such a lovely spot, and so adapted for persons of elegant tastes and limited incomes. There was a dining-room, in which one could not quite give what is called a dinner party; but three could sit down in it very comfortably, and even more, if the fourth didn't mind getting up from her seat to let the servant pass round the table.

This room opened upon a lawn, soft as a carpet (and not at all larger than are the common run of carpets)—the only naturally level piece of ground in the whole fairy demesne. The dining-room opened upon "the hall," upon the white stone floor of which you might have eaten your dinner, so far as cleanliness was concerned, and provided you did not have more than one dish up at a time, for there would not have been room for more; and, on the other side of the hall—a good long step (for a short person)—lay the drawing-room, quite a stately apartment by comparison with the rest, and capable of accommodating six persons—four in the body of the room, and two in the bow window, which was built in a bower of honeysuckle and roses, and looked, from the outside, like a bird's nest. The rent of "The Brae"—which, considered as a model for a habitation,

was really perfect, however absurd as a real dwelling house for grown-up people — was small even in proportion to its dimensions; but then Miss Crawford was such an eligible tenant for "not giving trouble," and for "putting up" with the widow's shortcomings and ignorance confessed of how "the quality" required to be served; and also, in all probability, "you see," said the widow, in confidence to her gossips, "she would be for a permanency."

Thus, though the income hitherto paid to her father, notwithstanding his change of name, by the good-will of the Government, had, of course, ceased, what with her very moderate out-goings in respect to lodging, and her inexpensive habits of living, Agnes, so far from being poor, was able to make more considerable investments even than before in that stock which, though it pays but little

more to its debenture holders at present than the London Chatham and Dover Railway, is spoken of by the clergy and others as likely one day to return an immense percentage. If giving to the poor is lending to the Lord, as there is good reason to believe, Agnes Crawford was laying up for herself much treasure in heaven. And yet she was not happy. That the prosperity of the wicked (unless prosperity means happiness) should offend us almost beyond reconcilement, appears unreasonable, compared with the distrust inspired by the unhappiness of the godly. *That* (as it seems to me) is a matter that much more requires an obedient, unquestioning faith. It is certain that Agnes Crawford was not happy. Unlike that pious gentleman who deemed it a cause of thankfulness (to himself and the elect) that there were "babes a span long in hell," she not

only wished that no little one should perish, but, if it were possible, not a single soul, and especially not John Carlyon's soul. What a short time had he to live, and in the midst of life how near was he to death; and yet what could she do? Many a night she lay awake in her sea-bordered home, while the great winter tides swirled in and out, and the wind moaned and shrieked like a lost spirit, thinking with aching heart of him who saved her from the roaring flood, but whom *she* could not save. What was he doing, what was he thinking, what was he believing, during those precious unreturning months? Mr. Carstairs had heard from him once or twice, but only with respect to certain business matters of a nature to be intrusted to him rather than to Mr. Scrivens. He was setting his house in order in one sense, yet there was no sign of carefulness for the most important matter of

all. How often were her small white hands wedded in vicarious supplication—how often was his name whispered to God through those pure lips! Many men have intercessors of this sort (besides the Great One), who, innocent themselves, little know what sins they would have shriven; and Heaven grant such prayers may not be altogether unanswered. Let us trust there must be something good in the object, however unworthy, that can provoke such supplications.

Winter, then, has come and gone, and it is Spring. The grass is green upon her father's grave, and his memory has faded away wholly, save from one loving heart. It is warm enough slowly to and fro to pace the tiny terrace of "The Brae," or sitting in the harbour, book in hand, to let it idly fall upon the lap, and watch the red-sailed fishing-boats putting out to sea with the flood, or the carts

with their freight of cocklers, crossing the *eau* to their work upon the sands, with the ebb. In the morning, Agnes sits there before she sets forth upon her ministrations among the poor or the sick, and those (saddest of all human wayfarers) who are at once both sick and poor; and in the evening, when her labour of love is over.

It is morning now; the beginning of a bright and cheerful May day, with a wind that has lost the sting of March, not keen, yet blowing free. The air is clear, and objects can be seen afar which are often hidden by the hazy veil of Summer. The tide is running out like a mill-race. If yonder fishermen, who have been fishing beyond Greycrags, be not wary, there is danger that their boat will be left aground. Agnes knows this from long acquaintance with the treacherous bay, as well as from her constant watching of the sands

and the sea during these latter months. She knows, too, the men who are in the boats; they are the Millets, father and son. If old Stephen (not improved in morals, poor fellow, although still proposing to be so—ashamed, but not reformed) were alone yonder, she would be alarmed for his safety; but William is with him, agile, sagacious, cool. Still, why do they delay? By the line of sea wall that is showing on the island, by the dark crests of rock that are rising here and there out of the yellow foam, she knows that they have already lingered longer than is prudent. True, the head of their boat is pointing seaward, but they are not yet in the main current, and their progress is very slow—slower than it ought to be, considering that one has the oars out, and the other is pushing his hardest with the punt pole. She makes out so much through a little telescope; but she cannot make out what is

the dark object they are towing astern, and which impedes their movements. She is not afraid, as one only acquainted with the dangers of the bay and not with its peculiarities, might be, of its being a drowned man. Such are rarely found in the locality in question, and never until the tide has retired. By great exertions, and with frequent and inexplicable changes of their course, the boat is at last got into the main stream, and hurries towards the village fast enough; the sole difficulty now lies in stopping it at what is called, by courtesy, the landing-place—a few narrow yards of planks laid upon a bed of shining ooze. Now, she can make out what it is they have behind them; it is a horse, fastened to the boat's stern by a bridle.

Agnes threw down her book, and hastened through the little garden to the landing-place. Some accident must have certainly happened

when a saddle-horse is found in that terrible bay; it is not long before they find the rider. Her mind at once reverted to Red Berild, and to him with whom it was so often occupied, his master; but John Carlyon and his steed were far away, she knew. Whose horse was this, then, exhausted, half-dead, hurried along by the rapid stream without any motion of its own, and at times half-rolling over, so as to show its girths, as though it were dead indeed? In a village like Mellor, one knows not only each inhabitant, but every horse and dog, yet she did not recognise this horse. Without wasting time in questions, however, she stood ready, as the fishing smack drew near, to seize the boat-hook which William Millet was holding out, for there was nobody but herself at "the point," as this place was called, where a jut of land turned the main course of the *eau* and formed a little bay be-

hind it. Into this bay the boat was drawn, with the poor animal towing behind it—a small black mare, with heaving flanks, and frightened eyes, who could scarcely keep her feet in the shallow water, although the sand beneath was tolerably firm.

"A bad business, miss, I fear," observed William, when they were safe in port.

Old Stephen, to whom, probably, conversing upon such a subject with Agnes was personally distasteful, contented himself with touching his cap and shaking his head.

"Where was it found?" asked she. "Poor creature, how it shivers!"

"Under the lee of the island, miss. A game little thing is that mare; she must have been in the water these four hours, swimming round and round, and round and round, with not an inch of firm ground for her feet."

"And the rider, William?"

"The Lord have mercy on him, whoever he be," answered the young man, reverently.

"You don't know, then, to whom the horse belongs?"

"Yes, I do, miss. But it may not have been the owner who was upon her, you see. Heaven forbid that it should have been."

"Why do you say that, William?"

"Well, miss, we're none of us fit; but Mr. Scrivens, he never loved God's people, and was a hard man to the poor."

"Hush, William; do not say things like that. We are no man's judges. Is it Mr. Scrivens' horse?"

Two or three men had gathered together at the landing-place by this time, and were helping with the boat; one of them, the ostler at the Mellor Arms, here interposed.

"No, miss," said he, "it's wuss than Lawyer

Scrivens, or at least it comes nigher to Mellor. Thats' Mr. Jedediah's horse."

"What, Mrs. Newman's son?"

"Yes, miss. He bought this mare of Mr. Scrivens only three days ago. I saw him cross the sands upon her yesterday, and spoke with him; he said he should not be back last night, for that there would not be time. He must have tried to come back, poor lad, and so been drownded."

Agnes turned deadly pale, and grasped the handrail of the little wooden pier; her limbs trembled beneath her.

"What is to be done, William?"

"I must get a horse and search the sands, miss, and you must go up to the Priory as was, and break it to his mother."

CHAPTER IX.

MY JED.

THAT would have been a terrible office for any woman, no matter of how dutiful a spirit, which William Millet laid upon Agnes Crawford, when he said, "You must go up and break it to her"—the almost certain death of her only son to a doting mother; but it was far worse for Agnes than for anyone else. Mrs. Newman and herself had never met since that angry parting at Greycrags, months ago, and she knew that Carlyon's sister had not grown less bitter against her in the meantime. It was impossible for Agnes, because contrary to her nature, to shrink from any duty; but it was

no wonder that in such a case she should procrastinate.

"We cannot be sure, William," said she, meekly, "that this awful catastrophe has happened. We do not know for certain that anyone is drowned, and far less who it is."

William shook his head, and answered, quietly,—

"Very good, Miss Agnes. As soon as the tide runs out, I will take horse and search the sands."

"This here mare won't be fit to carry a man within this twelve hours," observed the ostler; "even if she gets over this at all. A nice bit of blood, too, she is; and a pretty price, I'll answer for it, poor Mr. Jedediah paid for her."

Poor Mr. Jedediah. How that word shot through Agnes Crawford's heart. She knew the young man by report only too well; knew

of his evil doings amongst her own little flock; a wolf, he had been, to more than one pretty lamb. And, lo, he was now cut off in the midst of his sins!

"What horse have you up at the inn, Jim?" asked old Stephen.

"Not one," returned the ostler. "The greys are gone to a wedding out Northbrook way, and a gent, as come to our house last night, has just taken out the strawberry mare, meaning to call at Woodlees on his way home. I believe he wants to buy Squire Carlyon's house."

Marrying and buying, how the world runs on, though death is ever so busy amongst it! thought Agnes.

"Is there no other horse?"

"None as I knows of, ma'am; no, not one in the village, excep—" and the ostler hesitated, and looked at William.

"Then it's all the more necessary, Miss Agnes," said the latter, interpreting his glance, "that you should see Mistress Newman quickly. It's Mr. Jedediah's own horse as is wanted; there's none else. I am sorry to put such a burden on you, Miss Agnes, but you must ask her to lend him to me, you must indeed."

"Ask for her son's horse to search for his dead body! I cannot do it!" exclaimed Agnes, wringing her hands.

"You need not say it's her son as is lost, miss," observed old Stephen, cunningly. "You can say as *somebody's* a missing; there will be no lie in that, for, as you were saying, it *may* not be Mr. Jedediah after all."

The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light; and the old man's proposition was welcome to Agnes by comparison with the unrelenting

straight-forwardness of his son; it put off the evil moment, and even afforded some flicker of hope.

"I will go at once," said she, quietly. "You will come with me, William?"

"Certainly, miss. You see," continued he, as they left the landing and took the road together towards the Priory, "that I couldn't go myself to Mistress Newman's. I am out of her favour, although through no fault of mine. I thought it was only right to tell her something the other day, respecting—something about her son, as it was her part to look to; and she was very angry, very. Therefore she might think (which Heaven forbid), that I brought this sad news to her in the way of a judgment like. You, who have never given her offence, and are a lady like herself, and are much more fit to tell her."

"I see, William, I see," answered Agnes, mechanically. Her brain was busy with what she should say to this unhappy woman, not dreaming of the desolation that had befallen her, filled with petty thoughts, and probably even hostile and aggressive towards herself. What *should* she say?

Up the hill, and beside the ivied wall to the gate of the old house, which everybody, save its tenant, still called the Priory. It was getting very near now, that terrible interview; and nothing had been given her to speak. The page looked astonished when he opened the door; perhaps because she was a stranger to the house, perhaps because of her companion, William. On either supposition it was natural enough, and yet it seemed to add to her discomposure.

"I wish to see Mrs. Newman."

The boy lingered, as though some explana-

tion were necessary; very likely he surmised that something was wrong; "on very particular business," added she. He led the way at once up stairs; she did not notice that he gave William a sign to remain below; she had counted upon his presence and support, but she was ushered in alone.

Mrs. Newman, early as it was, had already breakfasted, and was seated at a window of the drawing-room, from which she had doubtless watched her approach; she rose and gave a cold and haughty bow. The room was cold and without fire; the atmosphere and the frigidity of her reception combined to chill the unhappy visitor. Mrs. Newman was the first to speak.

"To what am I indebted for the unexpected honour of a visit from Miss Crawford?" The tone was studiously constrained, but there was no mistaking the expression of the

speaker's face. It was the very concentration of rage and loathing.

"I come, dear madam——"

"Spare the 'dear,'" interrupted Mrs. Newman, harshly. "Pray avoid all unnecessary hypocrisies; I assure you that no words you can make use of will impose upon me."

"I have no wish to impose upon you, madam. I come as a Christian woman in the cause of charity, just as I would come to anyone else."

"Thank you. I have my own poor to attend to; and all that I have to give away has been given. I am not so rich as some folks, and have no such expectations, but I do my best."

"God forbid, madam! that it should not be so, or that I should doubt it; but you misunderstand me."

"Indeed! I only drew my conclusions from the person who accompanied you. An impudent, low-bred fellow, who has himself insulted, although he has not injured me as you have."

"I, madam?"

"Oh, you have a very innocent face, but it does not hide your scheming heart from me, young lady. And let me tell you this—in order that you may not stay here from the idea of your being welcome—that I hate the very sight of you. You are the vilest and wickedest girl I know—there is not a hussy in the parish——"

"Mrs. Newman," interposed Agnes, in a trembling voice, "there is a man drowned in the bay, and I want your horse—the loan of your son's horse—in order that William Millet may search the sands for the dead body."

"There are horses at the inn, which you

may hire, for you have plenty of money now, I make no doubt. Let the backbiting, impertinent knave, who seems to be your friend, take one of those. I will not lend him—him, least of all people—my dear son's horse. Jedediah is very particular about his horses."

"Those at the inn are all engaged, madam. Pray lend it."

"I will not. Is there anything else that you have come here for? If not, you have your answer."

"Oh, Mrs. Newman, pray forget that it is I who ask you, and lend William your horse. You will be sorry for it, else, some day, you will, indeed. Think of the father, or the mother, who may be awaiting the return of this lost man, and in vain——"

"Yes, or the lover," interposed Mrs. Newman, scornfully. "The young woman

that adores him, but who will be comforted a little, perhaps, if he has left her all his money. You feign astonishment, Miss Crawford, remarkably well. Do you mean to tell me" —here her voice rose to a shrill scream— "that you do not know that my brother, John Carlyon, has left you—you, you minx—doubtless for value received—all his money? has beggared his natural heirs for your sweet sake? Do you dare to tell me that you do not know that?"

"God is my witness, Mrs. Newman, that I have never heard one whisper of this thing before."

"Well, then, you hear it now, let us suppose, for the first time; mind, I say, let us suppose. Do not imagine that you will hoodwink me any more. Months ago, I confess, when I taunted you with some such design, though not one half so bad and base

as what you have effected, your pretended indignation almost imposed upon me. I was nearly regretting having called you husband-hunter, fortune-seeker; but I am not to be deceived now. However, supposing you hear for the first time of the disposition that this man has chosen to make of all his fortune—save a beggarly five hundred pounds left to my son—what is your opinion as to its character? Is it just? Come, though I am speaking of your lover, and to you who profit by his insane doting, is it honest?"

"Mrs. Newman, if what you say be true, I am as astonished as yourself, and almost as sorry."

"Are you ashamed, miss?"

"Yes. Ashamed to have been the involuntary cause of warping a just man's judgment."

"But when he is dead, and you get the money, you will keep it?"

"Not an hour—not a moment. I would not touch one shilling. So soon as the lawyers can do it, you will have every penny paid over to you, as though it had come to you directly, and all I shall ask in return will be that you forgive your brother."

"Come here, girl; more to the light, that I may see your face. Is it possible that you speak the truth?"

"God knows, madam."

So quiet, so gentle of speech, and the fair face so grave and peaceful, as it looked up at the morning sky, not even a miser could doubt her.

"Agnes Crawford, I do believe you."

"I hope so, madam, else you do me wrong indeed."

"Stop, girl," cried Mrs. Newman, with a suspicious glance; "the way that we find out whether persons are really sorry who have

committed theft—not that I call you thief, although my brother's will is robbery—the test of sincerity, I say, is restitution. You promise to restore what you may come by; but will you set that promise down in writing?"

"Very gladly, madam. Write any form of words down which you please, and I will sign it now, at once. Or get a lawyer to do so, if law there be for such a thing. In any case, it will be some hold upon even the most shameless, to have her written words to hold up against her; and that hold you shall have."

"Good; you do your best, though only what is right, girl," said Mrs. Newman, sitting down, pen in hand. "You have behaved like a lady and a Christian woman. You will understand that for myself I am quite content with your word. If it were

only *I* concerned in the matter, it should rest here. But the interests of my son are bound up with mine. To me, an old woman, and given, I trust, but little to the world's vanities, money is nothing; but my Jedediah —he, dear boy, is on the threshold of life. I should like to see him settled well before I die; married, perhaps, to some good girl like yourself,—for I believe you to be good, I do indeed,—and living on the old estate. He is a fine lad, and loves his mother; you must not listen to what some folks say against him."

"The horse, dear madam. You will let William have the horse?"

"Certainly; I will ring the bell and give orders." Here she did so. "He must be very careful with it, however, for it is Jed's favourite. The other, upon which he rode to Castleton yesterday, is a new purchase. Mr.

Scrivens——" Mrs. Newman blushed and hesitated. The fact was that, so desirous had she been to get the truth concerning her brother's will out of the lawyer, that she had given a large sum for the animal solely to loosen Mr. Scrivens' tongue; and in this she had succeeded. Never was such bad news bought at so high a price. However, all was well now.

"It was a black horse, was it not?" asked Agnes, very gravely.

"Yes, dear. Did you see it? How well Jed rides, and how well he looks on horseback; don't you think so? You have not seen him lately, perhaps; let me see, in three hours' time—he would be here for lunch, he said—he will be coming home. The tide has almost run down." There was a clatter of horse-hoofs in the road, and Mrs. Newman flew to the window. "How stupid of me,"

said she, with disappointment; "of course it couldn't be Jed. There goes William Millet on the grey, and I hope he will be very careful. I don't know how I should look Jed in the face, if anything—— What's the matter, Miss Crawford? What's the matter, Agnes?"

"Nothing; at least it may be nothing; but, dear Mrs. Newman, I have bad news for you."

"What—what?" interrupted the other, seizing her by the arm. "My brother is dead: say it is that. Say anything, but—— It's not my Jed. No, no, it's not; it cannot be my Jed."

"Let us hope, let us pray, for the best, dear lady. But it was the black horse—your son's horse—that was found in the bay this morning with saddle and bridle on him, but without a rider."

The pen fell from Mrs. Newman's fingers; her face stiffened; her eyes gazed upon Agnes in a sort of stupified wonder. The sorrow was too great for the poor soul to realise. "Let us go," murmured she, "up to my room. Help me up to my room."

Agnes knew what she meant; her bedroom was on the floor above, and commanded from its window a wide sweep of the bay, now getting bare and brown. So, leaning heavily on the young girl's arm, Mrs. Newman made her way upstairs, trembling in every limb, and murmuring to herself, with a pathos beyond all tears or moans, "My Jed—my Jed!"

The two women took their seats at the window, watching the wide waste of sand growing and growing with the out-going tide, while the sense of desolation grew and grew in the widow's heart. Her lips had ceased to

move, but ever and anon she returned the gentle pressure of the young girl's hand with a sharp grip. Her eyes followed everywhere the movements of a dark and distant speck, that was a man and horse, moving so swiftly, that it seemed to flit over the sands. As the day went on, the usual busy scene began to present itself in the wave-deserted bay, but the woman's eyes never wandered elsewhere. Suddenly they lost sight of this object of their anxious gaze.

"I don't see him, Agnes," exclaimed the elder lady, hurriedly. "I don't see William Millet. Oh, where is he?"

"He is behind the island, dear Mrs. Newman." Another clasp of the hand was her reply. Minutes went by, that seemed hours; then other tiny specks, that were cocklers, seemed to make towards the island, and disappeared behind it. There was

evidently something unusual thereabouts that was attracting them. Presently all emerged together—quite a thick black block—round the rocky promontory of the little isle, and moved towards the village, very slowly—like a funeral.

"Shall I go and meet them?" asked Agnes, tenderly; for her companion's suspense seemed to be growing insupportable.

"No, no; I shall know it soon enough—soon enough. I am not childless yet, Agnes—not my Jed, oh, God, not my Jed!"

But it was her Jed, poor soul! William had found the body of the unfortunate lad upon a spit of sand, quite near the island, but separated from it by what was in flood-time a raging river. He was lying upon his back, with his handsome face very pale and quiet, looking up at the sky, and the water (a usual

sight in such cases) coming out of his mouth, as one who saw him said, "like barm."

Jedediah had attempted, it seems, being somewhat in liquor, to cross the sands the night before, dangerously late, in respect of the tide; yet not so much so, but that one well mounted, and who knew the road so well as he, might have effected the passage. But his new purchase, the black mare, unaccustomed to the unstable track, it was supposed grew restive, and carrying him much eastward of the proper course, there threw and drowned him.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW SISTER.

AGNES CRAWFORD not only remained at the Priory to comfort the wretched mother all that day, but at Mrs. Newman's earnest entreaty, took up her abode there until after the funeral. Her unselfish goodness, evidenced by a thousand daily acts and words, worked its way into Mrs. Newman's heart, as the continuous falling of the pearl-like water-drops will eat into the grimmest stone; and well for the widow that it was so. Certain sad truths respecting her dead boy—fiercely combated by her at first, but which, at last, she could not resist—were presently disclosed. Mrs. Newman had to confess to herself that

her idol had not been all she had fondly supposed him to be. She was not less devoted to his memory upon that account—what mother could have been?—but the knowledge that her son had sinned, sowed in her this seed of good, that she grew to be less bitter against sinners. There must, she felt, be mercy for them such as she had not dreamt of, since it was needed for her dead boy.

Not a day now passed but Agnes came up from "The Brae," and sat an hour or more in the bereaved woman's company. She never stayed to dinner, because she saw that her hostess did not wish that; for, as time grew on, the old habit of saving, of parsimony, not unobservable even during that interregnum of bereavement, resumed its sway over the forlorn widow. Sad as it was, Agnes smiled to see it; for it was a sign that although the

heart-wound might not have been healed—and, indeed, could never do so—it was cicatrized. When the poor lady began once more to sniff at her cook, and bully her page, to count the cutlets that left her table, and pursue the half-pence in her grocer's book with wrapt attention, it was as healthful a symptom as the return of motion to the limbs of the paralytic. Yet, thanks to the influence of her new friend, she made some struggle against this infirmity of her nature. The first time she felt herself able to walk to church, she dropped something more than small silver (of which she always had a great store) into the collection plate; it was not, indeed, a coin of the realm; but it was gold, and had been valued as such by her for many years, and kept in a locked drawer in her cabinet. Mr. Puce called the next day at the Priory with a polite speech about her having

made a mistake, and given a much more rare and costly gift than a common sovereign; but she only said that she was glad such was the case, and bade him keep it for the good purpose for which it had been intended; it was only right that she should suffer for her carelessness. So Mr. Puce had to give the poor a pound out of his own pocket, and add *per contra* to his collection of curiosities at the Rectory, a Spanish moidore of an inscrutable epoch, and with a large perforation in its middle.

Nay, though the widow's loss bore heavily upon her night and day, she absolutely made use of it to excuse little economies and retrenchments; "now that her dear Jed had been taken from her," this and that were no longer necessary. Perhaps it was partly due to these proceedings (for any new act of thriftiness had always tended that way, as

"a good stroke of business" mollifies the city man) that her voice grew softer, her manners more gentle even than before; but something of this was doubtless owing to Agnes. Mrs. Newman's household outgoings for the day having been reduced to a minimum, that lady would welcome the young girl to her breakfast parlour with the sweetest smile, apologising for not taking her to the more ceremonious apartment upon the ground that the sun spoilt the carpet, for which reason the shutters were kept closed; or, quite as often, as time went on, the widow would walk down to "The Brae," and spend "a nice long morning" with Agnes, which was always made to extend over the dinner hour. It fortunately happened that, although she had given orders for that meal to be prepared at her own house, it consisted of cold meat, which will be "just as good to-morrow, my

dear, as to-day." This frequent hospitality, so cheerfully and ungrudgingly afforded, and the consequent disappearance of a few items from her own butcher's bill, completed her young hostess's conquest. An individual that is always glad to see and feed one, and who never looks for anything in return, is formed to be a miser's friend; nor was this unhappy woman's perceptions so dull but that she understood the motives which actuated her new ally. She knew that these were pity for her forlorn condition, and the pleasure of returning good for evil.

"It is very kind of you, Agnes Crawford," said she, as they sat together one afternoon in June in the little dining-room of the cottage; for the drawing-room was avoided upon such occasions at "The Brae," as it was at the Priory, although for far different reasons. Agnes would not compel her guest to look

out upon those sands which had been her son's untimely grave. "It is very kind of you, dear, to let me drop in here, and eat you out of house and home in this manner. I am afraid I am a great expense to you."

"Not very great," returned her hostess, smiling; "you don't eat much more than my pet bird yonder, to whom I give my breakfast crumbs; and if you eat, as you complain that good Mr. Carstairs does——"

"Well, so he does, my dear," interrupted her guest, laying her work down upon her lap, to allow of greater emphasis; "the last time he dined with me—that is, let me see, just nineteen months ago—he eat of every dish, and finished every one. I call it most ungentlemanly. And because there was nothing in two of the silver dishes—put for ornament, my dear, of course—and because

there were flowers in the champagne glasses and no champagne—the idea of giving a village doctor champagne!—he was really quite rude.".

"Mr. Carstairs is a very good, kind man," said Agnes.

"I don't deny that, my dear; I only say he is a most inordinate eater."

"And I say that you eat like a robin, and are, therefore, no judge," rejoined Agnes, smiling. "As for my expenses here, they are not much more than if I were a doll in a doll's house. Cubra, it seems to me, eats nothing but rice, so that I almost suspect her of being a ghoule; and Mrs. Marcon, I am sure, is the most honest and economical of landladies."

"Ah, well, that is as it may be; everybody seems honest to *you*, dear. You judge people by yourself. And that brings me to

the thing which I wanted to say to you. Every day, when I go to my desk, this writing reproaches me—look at it. It is what I wanted you to sign with respect to Mr. Carlyon's will."

"Your brother's will," observed Agnes, quietly.

His name had never been mentioned between them since the day of Jedediah's death. Agnes had deemed it injudicious to press that he should be asked to his nephew's funeral; but she did not think it right to pass by his sister's mention of him by his surname.

"Yes, he is my brother, of course; although his conduct has not been brotherly — that is, in this matter," added she, hastily, in answer to the young girl's glance. "I don't say that I did all I could to win him. But as to disinheriting

my Jed, that was a shameful thing, and—and——"

"Hush! my dear Mrs. Newman, hush!"

"You don't know what I was going to add," said Mrs. Newman, tremulously, "and yet—I was about to say—with respect to that will, now that I know you, I do not so much wonder at it. That is what I feel bound to confess. He loved you—how could he help it?—better than all else, and he strove to show it. And I can't blame him—that is, not now." Here she paused, thinking of the "might have been," with all its radiant hues, extinct for ever, and the tears rolled down her thin but not uncomely cheeks. "You have not signed it, Agnes, have you, yet?"

"I *will* sign it, dear Mrs. Newman, gladly."

"No, you have not, and you shall not. And what is more, if John, my brother, dies

before me, I shall not take this money. He meant it for you, and you shall have it."

Agnes smiled sadly. "What is the use of money to *me?*" asked she.

"Of much use. Of use to everybody, my dear," answered Mrs. Newman, with vehemence: then added, tenderly, "take it; do good with it. Kiss me, Agnes."

She tore up the paper as she spoke, and rising, threw her arms about the young girl's neck. She had overcome, perhaps, the greatest temptation of her life; but the struggle had been severe and long, and she felt the effects of it.

"There, I have done it now," cried she, "and I feel all the happier. If you like to give me anything *out of it*, you know, my dear," added she, cheerfully, "why, that is a different thing; you may let me have Woodlees, my old home—for it is not sold, I hear

—to live in rent free. But I want everything to be yours to do just as you like with. That's all."

"I hope none of it will ever be mine, Mrs. Newman. I trust Mr. Carlyon may be spared long years—and to God's glory—to possess it. His is a noble life, although it has hitherto been passed in darkness."

"You know his state of health, I suppose, Agnes, and what Mr. Carstairs thinks about him? He heard from him only last week, and he was saying——"

"Oh, yes—yes—do not speak of it. At least, not in that way. I know all."

"I am sorry to have distressed you, my dear."

The two women sat for some time in silence. The hostess stitching at some baby clothes destined to cover some expected little stranger in the parish, for whom there was

small welcome; the guest darning an old glove.

"Agnes," said Mrs. Newman, presently, in a very gentle tone, "I have been a hard woman all my life—except to one who is gone—but I am not hard to you. I cannot bear to see those tears. What can I do to comfort you? Nothing? Yes, a little, surely. When I pray to God to-night, I shall pray for somebody else. Not for you, for you do not need my prayers. Can you guess for whom?"

"Yes."

"Mind, I do not mean in my old way, as you are thinking. I shall not thank Heaven that I am not like him, unregenerate, wicked, predestined to eternal death; but as one fellow-sinner for another, as a sister for a brother."

"I am, indeed, rejoiced to hear it: at the

same time, as a Christian woman, it is only your bounden duty."

"True, but one I have not performed for years. And why shall I do so now, Agnes? Because I really love him? No. Because I honestly wish to be reconciled with him? No; I cannot even say that yet. Why shall I do it, then? Can you guess?"

"For God's sake, I hope, dear Mrs. Newman."

"No; for *your* sake. And why do I say for your sake? You need not answer me, my dear; I know all about it. How very much you forgot when you sought me out and brought me comfort; how very much you forgave, which even if it had been committed against yourself only——There, lean upon me; I am your elder sister now, since John Carlyon is my brother once again, and you, my poor girl, love him. It is poor

comfort that this can bring you, dear. A forlorn woman, vexed with petty cares, is a sad substitute for such a bridegroom; but it is something. The man that made the breach between us two shall henceforward be the link between us. I shall love you all the better and you will, at least, despise me less, Sister Agnes."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

It was night, and Agnes sat alone in her little drawing-room at "The Brae." Mrs. Newman had left her hours ago; not long indeed after she had expressed herself in such unexpected terms, with regard to her brother and Agnes. The latter was genuinely glad and grateful that her guest had confessed herself so changed for the better; that her mind was so conciliated, and the bitterness of so many years against her now only relative had been cast out. But so far as Mrs. Newman's demonstrativeness affected Agnes herself, it was no subject for congratulation. She felt humiliated, nay almost ashamed.

How had this woman guessed the secret which she had striven so hard to hide even from her own self? By what outward sign had she shown that she loved John Carlyon, when her own heart had been forbidden to whisper it? And yet how she did love him! How sweet it was to hear the poor folks talk of kindly Squire John! How welcome to her was the gratitude that prompted them to tell of his open-handed, generous ways; of his cool courage! With what pleasure she hearkened to their speculations regarding the next comer to Woodlees, always ending as they did, with, "Well he will not be a better gentleman than the young Squire, whoever he be." Better to *them* of course they meant: but was not that something? To have been good to the poor, to have been ready to risk his life for theirs; to have associated with them without one touch of Pride.

His lack of Religion, so far from deteriorating from such virtues, heightened them rather. If, not being a Christian man, he so behaved out of the mere excellence of his own nature, how much the nobler was that nature. How she had treasured the few commonplace phrases of Mr. Carstairs respecting Carlyon's health, listening as though they had no particular attraction for her ears. The good doctor had spoken quite openly about his patient. He had no idea that this girl who, to his own knowledge, had rejected the young Squire, was anything more than "deeply interested" in her discarded suitor. The letters he now and then received from him were not of a private nature, and their contents were freely communicated to whomsoever they might concern. There was always respectful mention of herself and inquiry concerning her well-being; for the

rest, a little business and a good deal of gossip composed the whole of these communications.

"He is no better, Miss Agnes," the doctor would observe in answer to her questions, "simply because it is impossible he should get better. You can't stop a hole in your heart as you would a leak. He doesn't mention his health, because he knows this as well as I do. He is leading a gay life, which is the very worst for a man in his situation to lead, and I am surprised that he has lasted so long. If I had known he was going to racket about in London, I would not have given him so long as a year to live; and I should not be the least surprised if my prophecy come true yet. The Ides of June have come, but they have not yet gone."

To all this Agnes had listened with a grave but quiet face, and without revealing the

torture of her heart. Successful in this, she had deemed concealment was easy under all less crucial tests. And yet this woman—to whom she had never since their intimacy breathed Carlyon's name, in whose presence she had studiously avoided speaking of him, although from no fear of such a consequence —had guessed the secret of her love. Agnes, though not insensible to Mrs. Newman's good intentions, was far from thanking her for this. Henceforward, then, the sweet solace of an unshared sorrow—for there are sorrows as well as joys wherein no stranger may intermeddle, and with which even a friend's sympathy is intolerable—was to be denied her. How far too might not this discovery extend? Would vulgar eyes begin to watch her with unwelcome pity, vulgar tongues to utter words of thankless comfort? It seemed hard that, though unrepining, she should not

be permitted to bear her cross alone; yet she was far from repining even now.

God knew what was best for her as for everybody. Perhaps it was to show the powerful temptation of worldly love that it was decreed she should be held up as an example of a Christian woman whose heart was given to a godless man: for it *had* been given, that was certain, and was John Carlyon's still. Her very being seemed to confess it when the life-blood rushed to her cheeks, as though in protest against such a reflection as she had just made.

Carlyon Godless? Impossible! God had suffered him to revolt for a while, but would presently beckon to him with forgiving finger. That was all. Presently? It must be very soon then. It is impossible to describe in words the mental agony which that last thought engendered. We grieve, we weep,

all hope and health seem to depart from us, because our loved one has died, and has left us for ever. That one dread sentence, "He is Dead!" seems to comprehend in it the death of all that makes our life enjoyable, nay bearable. But how much more terrible to the truly religious soul is the fear—nay the conviction—that our departed brother is not only Dead, but Lost.

The narrow-minded foolish folk who make up those spiritual cliques and coteries which do their very best to draw Religion into contempt, under pretence of fostering and protecting it, feel nothing of this. In their heart of hearts they either do not, for the most part, believe the fearful dogmas they enunciate, or they do not realise the effect of them. Otherwise, being men and not fiends, the sense of the eternal condemnation of the majority of their friends and acquaintances (of

which they affect to be convinced) would be ever present with them; it would take away their appetites (which it certainly does *not*), would destroy their sleep, would thrust itself between them and even the most innocent pleasure: they would never cease, like Solomon Eagle, from crying "Woe, woe!" As to the few who do realise what must happen if their creed be true, and yet have learnt to regard it with calmness if not satisfaction; the human wheat who are not disturbed by the doom of the tares growing up around them; who say quietly, "They will burn, but we shall be in the garner"—let them beware, lest instead of being the Elect, their cruel feet are set on the very road to Perdition. Very literally they apply the homely saw,

"Of all our mother's children we love ourselves the best,
As long as we're provided for, the Devil take the rest."

But it is doubtful if their selfish compla-

cency will be rewarded exactly as they expect.

Agnes Crawford's religion was not of this sort. She believed and trembled, but it was for others, not for herself; and for the man she loved, above all. As in some frightful nightmare we sometimes see one very dear to us blindly walking towards the brink of a sheer precipice, yet cannot raise hand or voice to warn him, so Agnes beheld the coming doom of John Carlyon. It was rarely out of her thoughts, and shadowed them, even when unrecognisable there, with habitual and deepening gloom. She was thinking of it now, as she sat by the open window in the summer night, looking forth upon the fast filling bay. There was no moon, and the sky was islanded with many a cloud, but by the dim starlight she could see the sweep and swirl of every white-lipped wave, as it licked up the sands.

What hope there was for any tide-caught traveller 'twixt where she sat and yonder hidden shore, so little and no more was for John Carlyon dying in his stubborn pride. Upon one yet uncovered spot, not many yards from land, stood up some object bare and tall; the mast of a fishing vessel, the hull of which was already buried in the quicksand beneath; to not less certain—perhaps to scarce less speedy doom—was John Carlyon doomed. Across the sea and through the misty veil that hung above it, flashed down on land and wave the revolving Pharos light; now hid, now seen; it was placed there for man's guidance and salvation; but if one were so blind or wilful as not to heed it, but steer right on into the gaping jaws of Death?

All things she saw supplied the unhappy girl with images of her beloved one's ruin. The wave sighed at her feet, the night wind

wailed above her in unison with her own sad thoughts. Even now while she was thinking of him, praying for him, he might be dead and——

"Agnes!"

The chill of fear seized all her frame, relaxed and enervated with sorrow, and froze it so that every limb grew rigid. She could not have stirred a finger to save her life. What was that voice, unlike to any that she knew, that had murmured her own name, close by her, in the very room? No thought of danger—of physical peril crossed her mind; she was terror-stricken with a nameless awe. Was it then true, as some good Christian folks had averred, that the spirits of the departed are sometimes permitted to return to earth and reveal their fearful doom to those they have left behind them? Was John Carlyon speaking to her, but not in the

flesh? What was this cold current sweeping over her, that made her shiver so, as the air of the vault did where they had laid her father months ago?

"Agnes!"

She knew the speaker now; yet her terror did not abate, but was exchanged for apprehensions of a different sort. The current she felt was the draught of air caused by the unheard opening of the door behind her. Her midnight visitor was one of flesh and blood; yet scarcely to be dreaded less than a spectre. How had he gained admittance to the cottage without her knowledge? And how had he dared to present himself, unannounced, at such an hour?

The voice was Richard Crawford's voice, but with a difference. Even when she recognised it as her cousin's, she could not fail to mark that. Why did he stand yonder

motionless—an undefined shadow—and not greet her; if self-conscious of no harm after so long an absence? What could this sudden visit mean, paid to her in her solitude, at midnight, by one that had parted from her with such studiously respectful mien and words? One answer only could be given to such a question, and her fluttering heart returned it, in many a hasty beat—"This man is mad!"

CHAPTER XII.

WAS IT FACT OR FANCY?

AGNES was the first to speak, for her cousin, like a very ghost, now stood silent and motionless, as though waiting to be interrogated. "Why don't you shake hands with me, Richard?"

The young man came forward quickly into the starlight, and held out his hand. She took his feverish fingers in her own, and holding them fast, looked long and steadily into his face. It had grown very thin and haggard. His eyes, more bright and prominent than she had ever seen them, moved uneasily in their sockets, as though seeking to escape her gaze. Upon his cheeks there

was an unwonted flush, which, with his wild air, gave to his beauty an almost lurid tinge.

"Where are you come from, cousin?"

"London."

"And what brings you here, so suddenly and so late?"

"You."

"Well, but I shall be here to-morrow. Why not come to-morrow? Go to the inn and sleep to-night, for I am sure you are in need of sleep."

"I never sleep," returned the young man, slowly. "I lie awake and dream—that's all. I dream of you."

"How foolish that is of you, Richard: when you could have come and seen me, if you chose, or at all events have written to me: I have heard nothing of you, you know, for many months."

This was true, but it had not distressed

her, for Mr. Carstairs had assured her that the longer her cousin remained away, and the less communication between them in the meantime, the better it would be for the young man's mental health. She knew that he would visit "The Brae" sooner or later; for he had left his sea-chest, containing his professional apparel, in charge of Cubra, to whom he had written once or twice, short, quiet, sensible letters, which had spoken of himself as well and cheerful; and the change in his present appearance was the more startling upon that account.

"No; I have not written, Agnes, but I have heard of you; and that is why I came down here. Look you," here he raised his voice, and struck the table with his clenched fist, "you have become friends with that man's sister. Why is that?"

"Because I choose, cousin," answered

Agnes, firmly. "Mrs. Newman has suffered much of late; she has lost her only son. He was drowned in crossing the sands."

"Her son? I did not know she had a son. Poor soul! I wish it had been her brother."

"Richard! Do you then wish him dead who saved your life in yonder bay? For shame—for shame!"

"Yes. All cowards deserve to die; and besides, I hate him."

"That you hate him, merely shows that you are ungrateful, Richard. As for the rest, John Carlyon is courage itself."

"What! when a man will not take an insult when it is offered?—will not accept a challenge when it is given?"

"That depends upon who insults—who challenges. Have you been seeking the man's life who saved your own—wicked, ungrateful boy?"

"I let him know what I thought of him, that's all, and I gave him the opportunity of resenting it. I say that he is a coward."

"But you do not think so, Richard. If you have come here only to tell me falsehoods, I have no wish to hear them."

"I am come here for something else, Agnes. Do not let us quarrel." Here his voice, erst harsh and sullen, sank and softened. "I am come to claim your promise, claim my bride."

"My promise, Richard?" The blood rushed to her face, and her breath came so short and quick, that she could scarcely frame the words. "I don't know what you mean."

"Ah! who is speaking falsehoods now? My pretty one that will not hint of love, except by those twin roses in her cheeks. My life, my own, my all!—ah, how I love

you!" His eyes had lost their shifting light, and beamed with ineffable tenderness; his face, so sunk and hollowed, seemed to have regained its look of youth; his fingers played with one bright tress of hers that had wandered from its fellows, as a child's hand with a flower. "How beautiful you are, Agnes! Let me hear the music of your voice."

It was plain that he might have been governed by her lightest word, did she but choose to humour him. If she had but said, "Go, love, and come to-morrow," with a meaning smile, he would have obeyed her. It would have been easy to hoodwink one already so half-blind with passion. But Agnes shrank from a treachery which to many would have seemed a pardonable *ruse*. She would not play fast-and-loose even with a madman.

"Cousin Richard, you have long ago had my answer to the question you would put. It is unmannerly, and most unlike a gentleman, to press me thus. I will never marry you, because I do not love you; and more, Richard, if you continue to persecute me in this unmanly fashion, I shall forget that you are my cousin—the only relative I have in the world—and——"

"You will not marry me!" interrupted the young man, vehemently; "and because you do not love me! That is not true. It is because you love another man far better. Now, listen; I will tell you something about that man, whom you think noble, pure, and truthful."

"Are you speaking of the man you strove to kill, Richard?"

"Well, that was a lie. I did but say it to prove you—to see whether you could love

him still, even if he were a coward. I *wished* him dead a thousand times, 'tis true—but then—why he saved my life. My curse upon him. If I had known, when we two stood upon the lessening sand yonder, and he was breasting the swift tide in hopes to save us—if I had known what was to come of it, and how this man should steal away your heart, I would have flung my arms about you, Agnes Crawford, and perished with you in the roaring flood, before your hand clasped his. I would, so help me, Heaven!"

"Heaven will not help you, Richard, if your thoughts are such as these."

"And you shall never win him now—be sure of that," went on the young man, vehemently. "You hope so—yes, you do—but that hope shall bear no fruit. I tell you he is not worthy of you—he is neither pure nor true."

"Is that 'to prove me,' also, cousin Richard?" said Agnes, pitifully.

"No," answered the other with vehemence, "as God is my judge. I know this Carlyon well. I ought to know him, for I have been his shadow for these many months. It has been my life's work to dog his footsteps. Yes, a spy; why not? I would have done worse things than that to gain my end."

"And what was that?"

"To find him false to you."

"There is no bond between this man and me, Richard, as I have told you long ago. He can break no faith who has not plighted vows."

"Then I suppose it is the starlight which makes you look so pale," answered the young man, bitterly; "it is the night air which chills your limbs and makes your voice tremble. Otherwise I should have almost

thought you were afraid to listen to the tale of this man's guilt. If I had been loved like him—nay, though you loved me not, and only because I loved *you*, all women have been nought to me for your sweet sake; no face, however fair, has striven within me for one moment for the mastery with the remembrance of yours; nay, if I have been base, as your cruel eyes told me awhile ago, it has been all for the love of you. But this man, though freighted with all the treasure of your heart, is blown about with every whisper from a wanton's lips. I have seen him, side by side with a bold beauty, her plastic hand in his, murmuring——"

"What I do not wish to hear, sir," cried Agnes, haughtily. "You may speak truth or falsehood. But if you lie, you cannot be more vile than to have gleaned this shame and thought to have furthered your own aims

by pouring it in my unwilling ears. I despise—I loathe you."

In the silence that followed close upon her angry words, she heard the handle of the chamber-door turn. The air, that had been flowing freely through the room throughout the interview, suddenly ceased, a third person then, had either just entered or just quitted the apartment closing the door behind him. She knew not who it was, but the consciousness of not being utterly alone inspired her with the courage that she was about to need.

"You despise, you loathe me, do you, while you persist in believing this man to be all that is chivalrous and noble? and you dare tell me that to my face."

"Yes, I dare."

"That is because you are angry, Agnes. A woman will say anything when her blood is up."

"Come here to-morrow, Richard Crawford, and I will tell you the same."

"How beautiful she is," murmured the young man, tenderly. "The passion which mars most women's charms only heightens hers. She loathes me, and yet, ah Heaven, how I love her!—You will never be my wife, Agnes, that is certain?"

"Never, never."

"Then, sure as Heaven is above us, no other man shall wed you. Look you here."

From his breast pocket he drew forth a sheathless knife and threw it on the table with a clang. The starlight shone upon the long and pointed blade, and glimmered on the stones that formed its handle.

"That is no steel for common uses, Agnes."

This young girl had no fear of death, nor even of untimely death; but thus to die,

stabbed by a kinsman, struck terror to her inmost heart. "Oh Cousin! would you kill me?"

"Kill *you*," returned the young man, with a bitter laugh; "you must have told me truth indeed, when you said awhile ago that you despised me. *I* hurt you? I would not harm one shining hair of that bright head, although such sacrilege should cause the Devil to forego his rights and so should win me Heaven. I only said no other man should wed you."

"No man is going to wed me, Richard."

"But there is one who would wed you, if he could, and whom you love. A man, says Mr. Carstairs, doomed to die early. And I say the same. You will never see him more, be sure of that."

"What, wretched boy, will you then be his assassin?"

"I shall stab him: yes. In two days from this, or three at farthest, John Carlyon will be dead, and it will be your love that killed him."

* * * * *

He was gone. Or, had he not been there at all, and was it a mere hideous dream? The sun was shining full on the window of the little drawing-room, but she was cold and shivering. How long had she lain upon the floor, whereon she had found herself when she awoke? And did she wake from sleep or swoon? No sign of her late visitor was to be seen. Upon the little table lay her books and workbox, but the shining dagger was no longer among them. Had it never been there, or had it indeed been taken away in fulfilment of that horrible threat? The deep silence of the early morning smote her heart with fear; she dared not be alone, but seized

and pulled the bell-rope. The little bell tinkling violently, just outside the door, roused the inmates of that pocket-dwelling as effectually as any alarm-bell tolled backwards from cathedral tower.

Mrs. Marcon, beheld for once without her widow's cap and weeds, hurried into the room.

"Lor, Miss Agnes, why what *is* the matter? How early you have got up, and how pale you are! I am sure you must be ill."

A moment after her entered dusky Cubra; her attire not presenting any very striking difference to that she wore in the day.

"Gorramighty bress us, Missie Agnes, what the matter?"

"There is somebody in the house. Some man."

"Robbers!" cried the widow, clasping her hands; "Heaven preserve us, this is what I

always thought would come of being a lone woman!"

"No, not robbers," said Agnes, gravely, and casting a suspicious look at Cubra.

"Lovers!" exclaimed the widow, with a shudder of disapprobation and surprise, "Lor, who'd a thought it with one of her colour!"

Cubra did not deign to reply to this remark, whether she considered it as a compliment or an innuendo.

"Are you sure you locked both the doors last night, as usual, Mrs. Marcon?" inquired Agnes.

"Oh, yes, miss, I am always particular about that; but it's very easy to see for yourself."

This suggestion that her lodger should satisfy her own eyes did away with the necessity of any solitary exploration upon the

widow's part which she would probably not have undertaken, notwithstanding the broad daylight, for millions of money. Upon the other hand, she was exceedingly averse to be left alone in the drawing-room; so the three women accomplished the tour of the house together, the whole inspection—which was a very thorough one—occupying about as many minutes. It was impossible that even a mouse could hide itself in that diminutive dwelling, and indeed they found one in occupation of the kitchen. Both doors were securely fastened on the inside, as the widow maintained she had left them.

"I suppose I must have been mistaken," said Agnes, when the search was over; "I am very sorry to have disturbed you: but I certainly heard a noise."

"And got up and dressed yourself, without calling us! That was very wrong, Miss

Agnes. Now do go to bed again, and try and get some sleep."

They did not suspect then that she had been up all night: and there was no need to tell them. Alone in her little chamber, she strove to recall what had happened in the drawing-room. Every motion made, every sentence uttered, recurred to her with a distinctness, very unlike the remembrance of a dream. And yet how could Richard have possibly concealed himself in such a house, on the preceding evening, or how escaped through the locked doors? Her agitation was such that she could not bring herself even to lie down, but having disarranged the bed to give the idea that she had slept there, she once more passed into the drawing-room. Yes, in yonder corner he had stood in shadow, and then again by the table, where he had rested his hand upon that very volume.

Strange and unaccountable as were his coming and going, she could not disbelieve the evidence of her senses. A sudden thought caused her to lift the sash, which the widow had closed and fastened, and lean out of window. Yes, it was as she suspected. Upon the little margin of flower plot that lay immediately beneath, between the window and the box-fringed gravel walk, there were two footmarks, with the toes turned towards the cottage. Her late visitor, stepping over her prostrate form, as she lay in a swoon, must have escaped by this means, letting himself drop—as he might very easily have done—from the window-sill. She had no further doubt about the reality of what had occurred; of the imminence of the peril that threatened John Carlyon; but it was necessary that others should have none. She felt convinced too that it was by Cubra's con-

nivance that her cousin had obtained entrance to the cottage, or had been harboured within it, the preceding evening. It must have been she who had informed him of her growing intimacy with Mrs. Newman. Every moment was precious, yet unwilling to arouse the suspicion of her black attendant, Agnes waited until she heard the latter—who was a very early riser—leave her room and busy herself in the kitchen. Then she stole quietly into the vacated apartment, and opening the chest where Richard's marine apparel was stored, took out a pair of shoes, and placing them in her pocket, sought the garden. Kneeling upon the gravel walk she compared these carefully with the footmarks on the mould, and found them—making allowance for the fact that the latter were the impressions of high-heeled boots—to correspond exactly. Then hastily putting on bonnet and

shawl, she let herself out at the garden gate, and after hesitating a moment at the turning that led to the Priory, passed on through the awakening village, and rang the bell at Mr. Carstairs' door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE IDES OF JUNE.

If Mr. Carstairs' audacious prophecy regarding John Carlyon's lease of life is to prove true, it must do so within the next twenty-four hours, for after to-morrow he will have lived his year. In the mean time the doomed Squire feels physically as well as ever, though mentally much depressed. London life does not suit him: the pleasures of the town have long ago begun to pall.

His existence at Mellor had indeed been aimless enough, but it was at least natural, and plentifully sprinkled with kindly acts and words to those about him. He missed the homely honest faces which had always a

grateful look in them when they met his. True, in London his hand was as ready to give, his heart to feel—and there is no place where the poor have greater need of help—but the charity which takes the form of subscription, although as advantageous as any personal aid to the recipient, has no such healthy effect upon the giver. He felt the bond between himself and his fellow-creatures loosening day by day, and with a sense of loss. And yet it seemed impossible for him to resume his old mode of life in the country, with its long periods of inaction, wherein his thoughts must needs revert to his lost love. He thought of her now, in spite of all distractions: how different she was from even the best of the fine ladies with whom he was acquainted; how superior to Edith Treherne, for instance, with her grand airs and shallow feelings. And what was it made her so?

Agnes was beautiful, indeed, but he had seen faces quite as fair; her mind was not uncultivated; she had the accomplishments of her class; but he knew girls more intelligent and more talented than she was. What was it then that made her charm so magical? It was her goodness, without doubt. But how did she come by *that?*

Vicious persons are, as a rule, much better than they seem, just as Puritans are much worse; among even profligates there is benevolence, kindliness, and even occasional self-sacrifice. Amid the whirl of fashion (worse than what is called "the vortex of dissipation," because it may last for a life-time, which the latter rarely does) there are sometimes little quiet eddies of well-doing. Its votaries not unfrequently do good by stealth, and would blush to the roots of their hair if they found it fame. But regarding the company he was

now keeping in the most favourable light consistent with truth (and this he did), Carlyon was obliged to confess that not only in extent and permanence, but in kind, the goodness of Agnes Crawford was of quite another sort than that of generous impulse. There was certainly something about it—supposing that the word really had a meaning—which one calls Divine. If it indeed was so, there was no wonder that Agnes could not, and did not love *him*. If she had done so, if she had but consented to bear with his spiritual deficiencies, and let him learn from her own lips the whole secret of her happiness — but she had not liked him enough for that; and he would have no other teacher.

He had, now and then, of late months—thinking "this would please her if she could know of it"—found himself in a church, and

listened without much profit. He had been taken hither too by Edith Treherne, to hear her uncle the "snowy banded, delicate handed dilletante dean, intone," with more amusement to himself than advantage. Edith was going to be married, by-the-bye, by that very dean in a few weeks, and to a most eligible suitor—a wealthy baronet of very ancient lineage, and who himself was upwards of seventy years of age. The match had been somewhat hastily arranged—the bridegroom feeling perhaps that he had not any time to lose—but the happy pair were "engaged," and the fashionable newspapers of the previous week had found themselves in a position to inform society of that fact. So far from this disturbing Carlyon, it rather pleased him. His conscience had somewhat pricked him as to the part he had played with that young lady, and he was glad that it had

not ever so slightly interfered with her prospects. Now if he should hear that some one was about to marry Agnes Crawford, he felt that it would well nigh drive him mad. And yet, not only had there been no such tender "passages" between himself and her, as between him and Edith, but science had declared him to be a doomed man. The grave, and not the bridal bed, was waiting for him. His lease of life seemed likely, indeed, to be longer than was expected; but it must at all events be very short. "The shorter," thought he, with bitterness, "the better." He should be sorry to prove Carstairs a false prophet; the little man's reputation was dear to him, he knew, and he had pinned it upon this very point. It would be quite a pity to disappoint him, and *qui bono?* What vista stretched before him—though indeed but for a short distance—in case he should live on?

A little more of this wearisome London life, so self-indulgent, yet so unsatisfying. No; he would at all events quit *that*. He would just stay in London twenty-four hours longer, in order to give Carstairs his chance, and then if he did not exchange his snug rooms at the Albany for some snugger chamber in Kensal Green, he would be off to the Continent. As though Black Care, which sat so immediately behind him upon Red Berild in Rotten Row, would not be ready to cross the Channel, nay, to fly with him to the ends of the earth!

If Carlyon had been a younger man, it is probable he would not have succumbed to these melancholy reflections, as it is certain that he would have escaped from the fascination of a hopeless attachment; but as matters were, the companionship of his own thoughts was growing less and less tolerable. In society, on the other hand, he had got to be

almost boisterously gay, and was voted by men (for he rather avoided drawing-rooms now) uncommon good company. When he left them, the life of the party was said to have departed from it; but it was only a galvanic sort of life, that expired with the artificial stimulus.

It was late even for roysterers; the hum of pleasure that succeeds the roar of commerce was quite hushed. The streets were so silent that the slow-pacing policeman made stiller by his tread their quietude. The stars were shining brightly, although the moon was young. Far as the eye could reach the broad thoroughfare of Piccadilly was tenantless, as Carlyon moved leisurely along it homewards. His cigar was yet but half consumed—and it is curious, how men, no matter how extravagant, object to throw away a good cigar; it was doubtless on account of this economical

habit, that he loitered, almost as the guardian of the night—whom he could hear coming up behind him, at a great distance—loitered and halted, shaking the area-gates and throwing his bull's eye into the keyholes of the doors. A cigar, with solitude and starlight, will make most men contemplative. Carlyon bethought him of the generations that had trodden that broad street before him, who had come and gone, finding even Piccadilly no continuing city; upon whom those eternal stars had looked down as they looked at him, so purely, so pitifully. And to what end? Were not the gas lamps equally useful, and much more to be relied on? As for beauty, the pyrotechnic display called gas-stars had in that respect clearly the advantage over the heavenly bodies. And yet there was surely something in the latter which the former could not boast of. Edith Treherne was a gas-star, but

Agnes Crawford was just like one of these: as pure, as pitiful, and as far removed from men like him.

"Hullo, you, sir!"

This exclamation was drawn from him by the sudden stepping-forth of a man from a narrow alley on his left, who placed himself directly in his way. "There is room for you and me to pass one another in Piccadilly to-night," continued Carlyon, sternly, "without rubbing shoulders, and you had best take your own side of the pavement.—Oh! I beg pardon; I see, it is Mr. Richard Crawford."

There had been a tacit antagonism between these two men from the very first; but they had always been frigidly polite to one another. The recollection of what he owed to Carlyon had restrained any expression of the young man's antipathy, and the squire on his part never forgot that Richard was Agnes' kins-

man, and one who was dear to her. But they each knew that they were rivals; and the one of them that the other had been successful where he himself had failed.

Carlyon would have held out his hand, perhaps, and said a few ordinary words of civility, but the look and manner of the other forbad that. His face, contrasting with the coal-black hair, was white as marble; his eyes burnt with the steady glow of hate; the iron steadiness of his arm, as it barred Carlyon's way, was a menace.

"It is late, I know, Mr. Carlyon," said Richard, hoarsely; "but I have waited for you here these four hours, and I must insist upon having speech with you."

"Insist, sir? However, we will not quarrel about a word. Your business must be urgent since it has put you to so great an inconvenience, although how you knew that I

was about to pass this way to-night is beyond my guessing."

. "I knew it, Mr. Carlyon, and much more. I have watched your every movement for these many months. In town and out of town, you have had a companion whom you little suspected."

"Indeed!" returned Carlyon, scornfully. "True, now I think of it, I remember that once or twice of late it has struck me that some fellow dogged my footsteps."

"It was I."

"Well," rejoined Carlyon, calling to mind something that Mr. Carstairs had written concerning this young man; "it is fortunate for you that you have said as much. A gentleman that stoops to play the spy is in the same category as one who, being wealthy, plays the thief. He is not the master of his own actions; and therefore——"

"Out of your charity he may escape the horsewhip," interrupted the young man, bitterly. "Thank you. I owe you my life, Mr. Carlyon, and you draw upon the bank of my gratitude without fear of its breaking, I perceive."

"Indeed, sir, I had forgotten the circumstance to which you allude," returned Carlyon, hotly; "and I beg you will forget it too. I wish to have no relations with you which are not of the most conventional sort. Pray release yourself from anything that may seem to link together you and me."

"I wish I could," replied the young man, sternly. "There is something else than the saving of my worthless life that set me on your track, and brings me here. You pretend to love my cousin Agnes."

"Silence, sir!" cried Carlyon, in a terrible voice. "Let me pass, I say."

"No. You may vapour as you please, but you shall hear me out. You told her, I say, that you were her lover, and she believed you. Nay, *I* believed you too until I came to know you. Till I found you with that girl—Edith Treherne—at Richmond, I thought you might have loved my cousin—not indeed as I love her, indeed no—but with an honest heart. I knew you were unworthy of her—who is not? —but I did not think to find you false to her. And yet how glad I was to find you so! If you had married that girl, I could have blessed you, deemed you the best friend that man ever had. But when I found her plighted to another, I hated you worse than ever, because I knew that Agnes would love you still."

"That Agnes would love me still!" repeated Carlyon, mechanically, but in low and gentle tones, like one in his sleep that dreams a

pleasant dream. Then she did love him after all; for whose evidence could be so trustworthy as that of his rival? His anger was clean gone; he began to pity this unhappy youth who saw in him, it seems, a more favoured suitor.

Richard marked the change in his countenance at once, and assigned to it the right cause. He had unwittingly been the means of giving this man hope in the very matter wherein he would have had him despair. Mortification, jealousy, hate, seized upon his soul together, and he was no longer himself. His fixed intention upon leaving Agnes two days before, had been (as he had told her) to kill Carlyon; but his better nature had in the meantime revolted at such an act of ingratitude, more perhaps than at the crime itself. All that he really wanted was to detach his rival's affection (the strength of which he

greatly underrated) from its object. If he could do that, there would be some comfort for him, even although he could never call Agnes his own. The idea of any other man's possessing her was intolerable to him, and he was well aware that she really loved Carlyon. He had also hitherto imagined that Carlyon knew this, and it had been his purpose in seeking the present interview to work upon his rival's pride with the same weapon which he had used with so fatal an effect in the case of his uncle. He had meant to tell him that if he were to marry Agnes, he would wed the daughter of a disgraced and outcast man. If this should fail—well, he had persuaded himself that it would not fail. He had not dared to look the alternative that had suggested itself to him in the face; and although the sight of his rival had set his very brain on fire, he had until this moment intended to

confine his arguments to words. But now that he found he had actually let Carlyon know for the first time that he was beloved, and the possible consequences of such a revelation flashed upon him, he forgot all his scruples.

"You need not smile, sir," cried he, passionately, "nor wear that look of triumph. If Agnes Crawford ever loved you, she does not do so now. She knows that you deceived her, played her false, and wooed another."

"What, did you tell her?" exclaimed Carlyon, seizing him by the collar.

"Yes, I told her all."

"Talebearer, coward, spy——"

The two men struggled together, each holding by the other's throat; Carlyon's giant strength had already made itself felt, when Richard drew from its hiding-place the long keen knife, the sight of which had of late

so terrified his cousin, and struck his antagonist two violent and rapid blows. Carlyon, with his hand to his heart, staggered and fell. Richard, transported with fury, would have thrown himself upon him, and stabbed him a hundred times; but the policeman, whose footsteps had been growing more and more distinct throughout the interview, now hastened up at the sound of their struggle, and the assassin, throwing the bloody steel upon the pavement, fled from him at utmost speed. The former having given the alarm, proceeded to attend to the wounded man. He was quite insensible, but the contents of his card-case showed he was within a very few doors of home, and as soon as assistance arrived, he was taken to his own lodgings.

"I doubt it's a bad job," observed the first policeman, to his fellow, as they emerged from the gates of the Albany; "them snug

chambers will want a tenant before long."

"Ah! likely enough. Did he speak e'er a word when you fust found him?"

"Yes, and a very queer thing it was he said—a pint to remember when the time comes, perhaps, though it's dark now. '*Carstairs was right,*' said he, '*after all.*'"

CHAPTER XIV.

NURSE AND PRIEST.

NOTWITHSTANDING the early hour at which Agnes had made her visit to the village doctor, he was already up and away, having been sent for to one of his numerous but ill-repaying patients in a neighbouring hamlet; so she turned her steps whither she had originally half resolved on going, namely to the Priory. But here, too, she was doomed to meet with disappointment, for the dishevelled page who answered her summons, informed her that his "missus" had been bad all night, and that he himself was under orders to run down to Dr. Carstairs to ask him to step up. Agnes knew that Mrs. Newman

was not one to send for medical advice at five shillings per visit, except from urgent need, and hence, not without grave misgivings, at once repaired to that lady's chamber. She found her flushed and feverish, after a sleepless night, consequent, in reality, although she ascribed it to other causes, upon the mental conflict and emotion of the previous day—her determination to be reconciled with her brother, and her heroic resolve to give up all claim upon his property—and if not seriously ill, at all events much too indisposed to receive the information which she had come to convey concerning Richard's visit and Mr. Carlyon's danger. There was nothing for it therefore but to wait at the house with as much appearance of unconcern as she could put on, until the doctor came, which did not happen for some hours.

After the interview with his patient, Agnes

unfolded to him in private all that had occurred during the past night, and besought his advice and assistance. He did not for a moment doubt (as she had almost apprehended he would) the actual facts of her narration; he had too high a respect for her common sense to ascribe any of them to hallucination; but from the opinion which he had himself formed of her cousin's character, he thought it exceedingly improbable that he would be as good or bad as his word.

"In the heat of passion, my dear Miss Agnes, and smarting under the bitter sense of disappointment, I can imagine this unhappy young man making use of any menace, and meaning, while he spoke, to carry it into execution. But any interval of time with him would produce first irresolution and then repentance. He is quite incapable—unless his nature has altered much for the worse of late

—of seeking out a rival with the intention of slaying him in cold blood."

"But if he is mad, Mr. Carstairs—if he is downright mad?"

"Mad he could scarcely be to have spoken so rationally as you represent him to have done. That his brain is liable to be affected by any violent emotion I do not doubt; but that, on the other hand, he has nothing of the crafty and malicious scheming of the madman about him I feel positively certain. Do not alarm yourself, my dear young lady. Believe me there is no such danger as you picture to yourself, but at the same time I will take care to put Carlyon on his guard. I will write to him by this afternoon's post. There—will that content you?"

"I suppose that is all which can be done?" returned Agnes, sighing. "But how frightful a peril, how hideous a crime, is this which

you talk of with such calmness. May God have mercy upon him, and turn his heart while there is yet time."

"Nay, Miss Agnes, if what you fear be true, there is no question of God's forgiveness in the matter; it is his own hand which has afflicted him."

Agnes' white cheeks flushed to the forehead: the surgeon had misunderstood her; her last words had referred to Carlyon; but she did not reply. Mr. Carstairs regarded her fixedly, at first with wonder, then with a look of pity.

"He shall be warned this very day, I promise you," reiterated he. "I will go home now and write the letter."

And he did so. That letter came to John Carlyon, only to remain unopened on his desk, because six hours too late to give effect to its contents.

Upon the afternoon of the third day, while he still lay fevered and unconscious, the nurse that waited upon him was called out—he being fast asleep—to see two strangers; one an elderly gentleman, who announced himself as an intimate friend of the sick man, the other a young lady, very beautiful, but with an air of intense mental suffering.

"You need not tell me who this is, sir," said the garrulous old woman, dropping a conciliatory curtsy; "it's Mr. Carlyon's sister. And very pleased I am to see you, mum,—not like some nusses as might be jealous of not being let to do everything for the poor dear. I was the fust to say you should be sent for: not as I feared the 'sponsibility——"

"How *is* your patient, woman?" broke in the male visitor, unceremoniously. "I am a medical man myself, so you may speak the truth in as few words as possible."

"I ax your pardon, sir, I am sure," said the nurse, humbly, and with an evident effort to curtail her loquacity; "better, sir, better; but he has had a bad time of it, and is not his own self in his head yet. It is his sister here as will do him the most good, as soon as he begins to come round. He has done nothing but call for you, mum, when he's awake, and moan about you in his sleep; its 'Agnes! Agnes!' with him from morning to night."

Agnes started and trembled violently, but Mr. Carstairs promptly came to the rescue.

"Very proper—very natural, nurse," said he; "but, you see, you make the young lady nervous, and since she has come to help you nurse him, that will not do. At what time does Mr. Martin make his visits?"

"Well, sir, he has been here this morning,

and he will come again at four or so; that is, in about an hour's time. But there is no reason why you should not come and see the poor gentleman at once; unless indeed the young lady is not used to a sick room."

"She is as good a nurse as there is in London, my good woman," answered Mr. Carstairs. "Mr. Martin and I are old friends, and I am sure he will make no objection to my presence, so you may lead the way."

His three days' fever, although intermittent and at times leaving him quite conscious of what was passing, had wasted Carlyon's giant form to a mere shadow. His eyes, fast shut, reposed in two hollow caves. His head, moving uneasily from side to side, was shorn of its brown curls. One large hand lay motionless upon the coverlet, bleached and thin; the other was thrust beneath his pillow.

"You find your brother sadly altered, miss,

I don't doubt," whispered the nurse; "but, bless you, he'll come round yet. The wound is healing very nice. It is deep enough indeed, but it runs crosswise, no thanks to the villain as stabbed him. What saved his precious life was the little Bible as he carried in his breast-pocket; that stopped one blow altogether and turned the other towards the collar-bone. The doctor has the book, with half the leaves stuck through, against when the trial comes on, if they have the luck to catch the scoundrel, which I should like to pull his legs myself upon the gallows' tree. But see, the poor dear is waking up a bit."

With a weary sigh, that told more of oppression than relief, the sick man opened his eyes. Unexpressionless and dim enough they looked, but they had lost the glitter of the fever-fire.

"He is coming to hisself," whispered the

nurse to Agnes, who mechanically had shrunk behind the curtain at the bed's head. Mr. Carstairs, on the other hand, was standing by the fire, in full view of Carlyon. The latter, however, took no notice of him, taking it for granted probably that he was his usual medical attendant. With difficulty the sick man drew forth the hand that lay beneath the pillow, and looked piteously at the empty palm.

"That's what he always do when he wakes," whispered the nurse, with that triumphant zest which the ignorant exhibit when imparting information. "It's a sign that he wants to have his hands washed."

"Well, Carlyon, my good fellow, don't you know me?" inquired Mr. Carstairs, gently, as he approached the bed. "You have had a bad bout of it, but we shall soon set you up again. I have come up to London on purpose to see it done."

"You're a good soul, Carstairs," murmured the sick man, smiling feebly. "Take my hand and shake it, for I can't shake yours. God bless you!"

"Those are pleasant words to hear from your lips, my friend; they give me hope that He has blessed *you*."

"I hope so. At all events, I have given up the fight against him, Carstairs. He was too strong for me, and I have made my submission. Perhaps I should have done it earlier, but for——" Here he paused, and a look of unutterable tenderness stole over his haggard features. "Where the bribe is very large, an honest man turns his head the other way, and keeps it so as long as he can, and, oh, my friend, what a bribe was offered *me!*"

"Nay, nay; I must go away if you excite yourself thus, Carlyon. I do not come here to do you harm but good. You may smile

in that lackadaisical manner, and shake your head as much as you please, but I say 'good;' and good for evil, too, considering that you have already made my prophecy of no effect, and intend, I dare say, for contradiction's sake, to get as well, and strong as ever."

"Not so, my friend, do not deceive yourself," returned Carlyon, gravely; "nor do I wish to live."

"Very well, we will talk about that when you are convalescent, and can argue the matter on fair terms. When a man is so ill as you have been, he sometimes feels like one who accidentally finds himself near a place he means some day to visit, but had no present intention of doing so; it is not worth while, he thinks, since he is so nigh the grave-mouth, to return. Such thoughts, however, do not become a man of courage. You were looking

for something beneath the pillow, my friend; what was it?"

"A very little matter, Carstairs; a very foolish matter, as it will seem to you. But there is a little note in yonder desk—it lies on the right-hand, just as you open it—which I like to have under my pillow."

Mr. Carstairs gave it him, and as he did so, could not but notice the handwriting of the address.

"You know from whom it came, my friend," said the sick man.

"Yes."

"All the world might read it. When next you are asked to dinner, it will be in the self-same phrase; and yet this is the dearest thing I have. They are the first words and the last—save one, which you have seen—that I ever had from her. God bless her!"

"If she were to come and nurse you,

Carlyon, in your sister's place, but at your sister's special wish, what would you say then?"

"I would say that heaven had wrought a monstrous miracle, and sent an angel with the devil's own credentials——"

"Hush, hush, Mr. Carlyon," said Agnes, stepping from behind her screen; "do not wrong your sister thus. God has touched her heart, as I had hoped he had touched yours, and she loves you and prays to Him for you."

Carlyon's face was lit up with a great glow of joy, and he strove to raise himself to greet her; but the effort was beyond his strength, and he fell back with a feeble groan.

"Remember, young lady," interposed Mr. Carstairs, firmly, "you are Mr. Carlyon's nurse, and not his priest, here. I must have no such talk as this—at least, not now."

And Agnes obeyed him; "Sister Agnes," as Carlyon called her throughout her mission, and as Mr. Martin came to call her when he found how well she deserved the title.

A breezy, jocund, health-diffusing man was the doctor—an old friend and fellow-student of Mr. Carstairs, as it happened—who, living close by, had been called in by happy chance to the wounded man.

After a day or two, the country practitioner went home, feeling sure that he had left his friend in safe hands, and leaving behind him Agnes and widow Marcon, who had accompanied the former to town, since her suspicions of Cubra's having some confederate hand in the recent calamity, forbad her taking her own attendant. It was, doubtless, very "bold," and "dangerous," and "indecorous," in the eyes of some people (although Mrs.

Newman had both approved of and pressed her doing so) that she should help to nurse Carlyon every day; but I do not think Agnes was much distressed by that consideration—having a Great Adviser whom she was wont to consult in all matters—even if she entertained it at all. And indeed such misgivings were totally out of place. It was true that the sick man grew stronger, and bade fair to make a complete recovery from his wound; but he still considered himself, as did Agnes likewise, as a doomed man. His heart had troubled him of late so incessantly that he could not forget that his days were surely numbered; and she, so soon as he could bear it, had pressed the claims of religion upon him with the earnestness inspired by the same conviction. Their behaviour was very far from that of lovers. She read to him from that same book whose resistance to the

cruel steel had saved his life, and he listened like one upon whose favoured ears fall the very harmonies of heaven; but all her influence, all her charms, were made to serve that cause alone to which Carlyon was slowly but surely being won; she had no thought, no dream of winning him, except for God.

He had received a letter from Mrs. Newman, the contents of which, perhaps, penetrated him more than all else with the sense of this young girl's goodness. He had reproached himself somewhat with not having written to his sister upon the occasion of Jedediah's death; that opportunity passed, it seemed well-nigh impossible that they should become friends; and lo! now the overture of reconciliation had actually emanated from her. Who but Agnes could have brought this about, and by what other means than those to which she herself attributed it—that

faith by which miracles were said to have been wrought of old?

Agnes told him of Mrs. Newman's revelation to her concerning the disposal he had made of his property by will, and of that lady's subsequent self-denial.

"I could not have believed it," said he, gravely, "from any other lips than yours. What a pang it must have caused poor Meg!"

"Yes, Mr. Carlyon," said Agnes, with an answering smile; "but you must not inflict it a second time. Under no possible circumstances should I have taken, or would I take one shilling of that which she so highly values, and which should naturally revert to her; but the gift must come directly from your hands, and not through mine."

"What, must I make another will then, and leave you nothing?"

"Certainly. What right have I to what you have to leave? Nay, even what need of it?"

"You will let me bequeath you Red Berild, however, the horse that saved your life to bless mine—the horse that you sketched on Greycrags lawn in those happy summer days, Agnes?"

"Yes; you may leave me Red Berild, Mr. Carlyon, if my acceptance of it will please you," said she, softly. "I have been to see him since I came; Mr. Carstairs took me; the noble creature looked so wistfully for the master that we could not bring."

"Poor Berild! You will ride him for my sake, Agnes; he is very quiet, and after a little you will find that you may guide him—as you did his owner—with a word."

So, like two children in a churchyard, into whom enters no natural thought of mirth and

play, because of the open grave close by them, and of its expected tenant, Agnes and John Carlyon spoke not of earthly love and scarce of this world at all.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONSULTATION AND ITS RESULTS.

WHEN Carlyon was well enough to lie on the sofa, and take his meals with the enthusiasm incident to a convalescent after fever, Mr. Martin announced his own occupation to be gone. "I never stay where I am not really wanted," said the cheery surgeon, "but if you like being doctored, I will send you a man who will stick by you, and give you pills as long as you choose to take them. In my opinion you are cured."

"Cured of my wound?" returned Carlyon, slowly. "Yes, thanks to you, sir, I feel that I am. This is not the first time that I have been deeply indebted to your profession."

"Ah. Well, I hope you'll never need to see any one of them again."

"Thank you," returned the patient, smiling. "I shall be always glad, however, to see *you* again, Mr. Martin—that is at dinner; and likewise our good friend Carstairs."

"Ah, capital fellow, Carstairs," assented the surgeon, cheerfully, at the same time walking to the door and opening it as though to make sure that the nurse was out of ear-shot. Agnes had been sent out by his own edict that afternoon for a "constitutional" with Mrs. Marcon, in the park, for the recent change from her usual active habits at Mellor had begun to tell upon her somewhat. "A capital good fellow is Carstairs, and a man of science too, but crotchetty; between ourselves, sir, infernally crotchetty. We were students together at Guy's."

"Were you indeed?" rejoined the sick man, languidly, and thinking to himself how long Agnes had been away. "What an immense time ago it seems."

"Eh! well, it's not so long, sir," rejoined Mr. Martin, sharply. "I don't suppose either of us is fifteen years older than yourself. But what I was going to say is, that even then Carstairs was very like some sexagenarian physician, who has devoted his whole energies to one branch of disease, and has got to believe that all mankind, either directly or indirectly dies of it. With doctors who are ladies' doctors, this creed is of course restricted by the sex of their patients (to which, by-the-bye, it is my opinion that some of them assimilate in time, and become old women), but otherwise this fanaticism has no bounds. With a young practitioner, however, it is not usual to make one disease swallow

up all others, like so many Pharaoh's serpents; and yet Carstairs, even as a student, entertained this curious notion. We used to call him Angina Carstairs."

"Ah, indeed," said Carlyon, drily. "He was effeminate, then, as a young man, was he?"

"Not a bit of it, sir, but he thought everybody was sure to die of *angina pectoris*—he believed everybody—even those who had *no* hearts, like our hospital porter, who was a savage—had disease of the heart."

For the first time since his wound, Carlyon sprang up to a sitting posture, supporting himself by one hand, while the other was pressed tightly to his side.

"Oh, sir," said he, "do not hold out to me a false hope; even now I feel that Carstairs has told me nothing but the truth."

"What, that you would be a dead man

a fortnight ago! That, Miss Agnes tells me was his cheerful prognostication, and yet you have eaten a very tolerable breakfast for a '*post mortem*.'"

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Martin, that I have not heart disease?"

"By your change of colour, my dear sir, and the pain you are evidently feeling in that side, I should be inclined to think that you have," answered the surgeon, quietly. "If I chose to use the stethoscope, I could undoubtedly tell you for certain; but that is not my line. If the young gentleman's dagger had gone through your heart, it would have been my business to pronounce you dead. No physician—who had any respect for himself and the profession—would have ventured to have done so. But this is no surgical case. If you take my advice, you will allow me to call in Dr. Throb. He

knows more about heart disease than any man in Great Britain; and there is this great advantage about him, that even if you have not got it he will prescribe for you as if you had. I am sure it will be a great satisfaction to your feelings to procure the opinion of a man like Throb. And besides, my dear sir, you will be witness of a consultation which, of itself, is quite as good as a play—although, to be sure, it's a little dearer."

"If you think a consultation will be of any use——" began Carlyon.

"I don't think it will," interrupted the surgeon, irritably. "A duel is no sort of use, for instance, but everybody calls it a satisfaction. It settles the matter one way or another, at all events. Come, let me call in Doctor Throb."

To this proposition Carlyon, not very eagerly, gave assent, and Dr. Throb condescended to

make an appointment at the Albany for the afternoon of the day after the morrow. That great man, so far as physical stature went, was a very little one; much smaller than Mr. Carstairs, and round as a ball; but his grey eyes were large enough for a policeman's lantern, and roved fiercely about under his shaggy brows, as though in search of the villain who might venture to contradict him. Even the presence of Agnes failed to soften that terrible glance, although he gave her a reassuring nod, as if to guarantee her personal safety, menaced by his tremendous arrival. He had been previously closeted with Mr. Martin—for a medical consultation is uncommonly like one of those children's games wherein two little folks go out of the room and whisper together, and come in and guess and then go out and guess again—and perhaps that gentleman had softened the bashaw's

heart towards the poor girl. But he had not softened it at all towards Carlyon. Dr. Throb marched in, like a drum-major at the head of an invading army; glared upon his patient—indignant perhaps at his being so large; shook his learned head, like a terrier with a rat in his jaws, and then turned to Mr. Martin, and said "Yes," decisively, although the surgeon had said nothing whatever. The great man had previously addressed the salutation "Humph!" to Carlyon himself, so that there was no necessity for any further courtesies, and he proceeded at once to business. To see him cast himself, stethoscope in hand, upon his victim, was to witness a gladiatorial exhibition; but in reality his every movement was directed with the utmost nicety and skill. This examination ended, Dr. Throb put certain questions to the patient regarding his own symptoms, exactly as though he were

himself the chief inquisitor, and Carlyon, a heretic, doomed, upon the slightest show of hesitation, to the thumb-screws, rack, and stake. Then pursing his lips, and giving that mysterious nod to the surgeon, which the lady of the house gives to her principal female guest before leaving the dinner-table, the physician led the way to the consulting-room. As the door closed, Agnes stole to the sofa and took the sick man's hand. There was something in this Goth of a doctor's manner which had given her hope.

"I feel," said she, calmly, "an uncommon confidence in that man's judgment."

"So do I," answered Carlyon, smiling. "But indeed, if his opinion is not to be relied upon, he impugns the beneficence of the whole scheme of creation. Such a terrible Turk would otherwise scarce be permitted to live."

"If his verdict should agree with that of

Mr. Carstairs," said she, in trembling tones, "you will not receive it as you did his, I know."

"No, Agnes. Thanks to you, it will no longer be with dogged submission. I shall say —and honestly feel it—God's will be done."

She had scarcely time to resume her former position when back stalked the little doctor, with drums beating and colours flying, and a triumphant flourish of trumpets. The chamber had evidently been given up to pillage; but was the life of its tenant to be spared?

"Humph!" said he. "You have heart complaint, Mr. Carlyon."

"I quite expected to hear you say so, Dr. Throb. My friend and medical adviser in the country gave me to understand——"

"Pooh," interrupted the great man. "He 'pledged his professional reputation,' didn't he, that you wouldn't live six months?"

"He said a year, sir."

"He might just as well have said a fortnight. Medicine is not an exact science like mathematics; and he was wrong, you see. He has forfeited his professional reputation—which most country practitioners would be very glad to do, and start afresh. He ought to be under great obligations to you, this Mr. Whatshisname—Farstares."

"But he was right so far as my having heart complaint?"

"Of course he was; no man with ears could be wrong about that, sir. You *have* heart complaint; but what of that? You may die of it, of course—you must die of something, I suppose—but you may also live with it for a quarter of a century, and die of drink at last. I have known a worse case than yours where the patient lived for longer than that, and was eventually hung. Good

morning, sir; good morning, ma'am." And away marched the little doctor, with a nod of great severity, to fresh fields of conquest and subjugation. But when he reached the outer door he turned round sharply to Mr. Martin, who had reverently followed him so far, with—"I say, my good fellow, can *he* afford *this?*" and he took out a crumpled note, which he had received in fee from Carlyon, by a most dexterous back-handed evolution, and without moving a muscle of his face. But it was one of this great man's weaknesses to object to take large fees from persons of moderate means, or any fee at all from poor folks.

"Oh, yes, he can afford it," said the other, laughing.

"I am glad to hear it, for both our sakes," returned the little man, with a significant action of the left eyelid.

With his professional brethren, and when removed from the observation of patients, Dr. Throb unbent a good deal. He was whispered to be invaluable at medical dinners—the only festive occasions he ever patronised—and there was even a story current, among the more audacious students of his hospital, that he had once sung a comic song.

When Mr. Martin went back to his patient he found him as sad and silent, as though the sentence of Dr. Throb had been for his immediate execution, rather than a dismissal upon his personal recognisances, to come up when Justice Mors chose to send for him—as it really was. Agnes too was paler and more thoughtful than she had looked throughout the consultation. His entrance seemed to be a relief to both parties.

"Nice, agreeable, affable person, Dr. Throb, is he not?" inquired the surgeon, cheerfully.

"Very much so," said Carlyon, absently.

"I dare say he is very clever," observed Agnes, evasively. "I feel a great confidence in his judgment. If you will be so good as to ring for nurse, Mr. Martin, I think I will go to my lodgings, as Mrs. Marcon will be anxious to hear what his verdict is."

She cast a glance at Carlyon full of unspeakable emotion, but he had closed his eyes and lay back on the pillow, as though overcome by weakness. She rose softly, and left the room as the nurse entered it. Mr. Martin followed close upon her.

"As Mrs. Marcon has not yet come for you," said he—that respectable old lady being in the habit of calling for her every evening at six o'clock with the regularity of clock-work, "you must allow me to see you home, Miss Agnes."

"I am not afraid of going home alone, Mr.

Martin, and I know your time is valuable," answered Agnes, quietly

"You would also rather be alone just now, would you not, my dear young lady? That's the very reason why I am going with you. I have got something of importance to say to you upon the road."

When they had fairly started, and she had placed her fingers lightly on his arm, the surgeon patted them in a reassuring manner, and began as follows:—

"You are trembling, my good girl, and all in a flutter, and it is not about me, I know. If I was twenty years younger, and did not happen to have a wife already, that reflection would distress me, but as it is I am only distressed about yourself. You said just now that you have confidence in the judgment of Dr. Throb; and, as generally happens, you are quite right. He is a very wise man in

his vocation, and can tell by the look of a young lady, without even so much as feeling her pulse, whether there is anything the matter with her heart. Now as we were in consultation together, when (between ourselves) we doctors talk about almost anything except the patient, he remarked that there was something the matter with yours. It's not my line of business, you know, but I'm bound to say that he only corroborated my own observation. There, don't cry—or, if you must cry, put your veil down. The symptoms are obvious; a general practitioner in the country (as Throb would say) could scarcely make a mistake in your diagnosis. You are in love with my poor patient yonder. Now, my dear child, I am old enough to be your grandfather, so that there is no occasion for embarrassment with me; but if you tremble in that way I shall be obliged to call a cab, and I can never

hear a word that's said in a cab. You are in love with John Carlyon, I say, and I needn't tell you that he is in love with *you*. Well, why did you say 'no' when he asked you to marry him, some ten minutes ago? I don't, of course, wish to pry into private matters, but if it is religion—or rather (as you wrongly imagine) the want of it in him——"

"No, sir, it is not that, sir, now, thank God," interrupted Agnes, earnestly.

"Then what the dickens is it?" inquired the surgeon, with irritation.

"Sir, there are two reasons, since you force me to speak so openly," said Agnes, with firmness; "but I deny your right——"

"Of course, my good young lady, I have no right," interposed the surgeon, briskly, and once more patting her fingers; "but it's my privilege. You'll find it in all the diplomas. Now, what are the two reasons?"

"One is, sir, that I cannot marry the man whose life has been attempted by one of my own blood, the only relative I have in the world."

"Oh, I see. You make your relative's quarrel your own. Since your cousin has failed to kill this man, you will, at all events, deny him all that makes his life worth having. That is the true Corsican fashion; but I should doubt whether it has the approbation of the Christian Church."

"I mean, sir," explained Agnes, gravely, "Mr. Carlyon has never spoken to me about Richard; never hinted at whose hand laid him upon what might have proved his death-bed; but there are times when I feel that I have almost been his murderess."

"Tut, tut; you could not help two men falling in love with you—I dare say a dozen have done it—nor could you prevent one of

them going mad after sunstroke. The rest of the circumstances I have had only at second hand, but *that's* a medical fact, and I can speak of it with certainty. This mad cousin of yours too has left the country, has been traced into a ship bound for the Indies, whither he has gone under the agreeable idea that his rival is disposed of. There will be, therefore, no necessity to ask him to the wedding, or otherwise inconvenience yourselves by his attentions. To suffer this poor lunatic to blight the life of a man like Carlyon is mere wanton cruelty under the guise of sentiment. I am sure you will not do this, Miss Agnes. I hope, for the sake of your reputation for common sense, that the second reason for saying 'no' is more valid than the first."

"Yes, sir, it is, indeed. Forgive me, Mr. Martin, but I cannot pursue this subject

farther, except to say this much—I am sure that your questions have been dictated by a desire to do good, to diffuse happiness. The second objection I cannot reveal. It is a family secret. True, there was a time when it did not seem to me so insurmountable an obstacle, but that was because a still more formidable impediment—that of Mr. Carlyon's opinions—lay in the way. Now he is no longer a godless man I wonder how I could have ever overlooked the barrier of which I speak."

"There is madness in her family," thought the surgeon, his mind recurring to her cousin's frenzied act; but the next moment he recollected that his aberration had been produced by the tropic sun.

"My dear young lady," answered the surgeon, tenderly, "I have no intention of prying into this unhappy matter; I only

charge you, as you are a Christian woman, not to embitter this man's life without great cause. If any disgrace"—he felt her shudder through every limb—"has ever happened to any of your kith and kin—for that it has not done so to yourself, I am very sure—see that it affords not only a reasonable but a sufficient ground on which to reject a brave man's love. I do not say there may not be such a disgrace; it is my opinion, however, that you should reveal it, whatever it is, to his own ears, and then abide his decision."

"I could never tell him, sir," replied Agnes, in half-choked tones. "It reflects upon the memory of one that is most near and dear to me, and who is gone to his rest after long years of trouble."

"Poor dear! poor dear!" ejaculated the surgeon, tenderly; "I have only then one alternative to propose. However sad may be

this secret you speak of, however insuperable a difficulty it may present to your eyes, you cannot gauge this man's love and say it is not sufficient to overcome it. Since you shrink from speaking with him on the subject, write the whole matter out, and let me place it—sealed—in his own hands. He will certainly make no bad use of the information; at the worst it will remain with him a sacred trust. If it strikes him as it does you, you need never see one another any more. If, on the other hand, he writes back, 'Come,' that will be a sign that he prizes you at a value, from which nothing can materially detract. See, here we are at our journey's end. Let me exact this promise of you. Let me call for this writing in a few hours, for such a matter is best done at once, and done with. Say 'yes,' my dear Miss Agnes, I adjure you. At least, let this man's future life be marred

by no misunderstanding, no meaningless repulse. It is better for a man to be denied than to be evaded."

"I will do as you request, Mr. Martin," said Agnes, sighing; "but you do not know the heaviness of the task you lay upon me. The paper shall be ready within two hours."

"That's a brave, good girl," said the surgeon, with affectionate earnestness. "I shall call for it myself, and it will never leave my hands till it reaches his. God bless and strengthen you, my dear."

The next moment the door of her lodging opened and Agnes hurried in.

"Now, if I were in that fellow Carlyon's place," mused Mr. Martin to himself, as he turned away, "I would marry that very charming young woman, no matter what might be urged against her family, and although both her parents had perished on the gallows."

CHAPTER XVI.

CUTTING THE KNOT.

"WHEN you have read this, write to me," were the words which Agnes had appended to the secret statements confided according to promise to Mr. Martin's care, for Carlyon; and now it was the second day, and yet she had received no answer. For the first and last time in her life she had written "Agnes Vane," at the foot of what was an honest narration of her unhappy father's misfortune. The old man had not concealed it from her, although her cousin had taken it for granted that he had. The threat, therefore, employed by Richard of revealing his uncle's secret had been quite without weight, so far as Agnes

was concerned, however it may have told with respect to others. But Mr. Crawford, naturally enough, had estimated his nephew's worth, or rather the want of it, by the baseness of the menace, and had judged his unfitness to become her husband by the very means which the young man relied upon to insure his acceptance. Whether rightly or not, we cannot tell. To secure Agnes for himself, it was true that the wretched youth had stooped to every baseness, and even to crime; but with relation to all other things he had behaved himself with honour and probity. Strange as the comparison may seem, the love of her was to him like the one vice, such as gambling or drinking, which so often deforms an otherwise noble character. If Richard Crawford had been her accepted lover from the first, perhaps he would never have strayed from the broad road of right.

By reflections upon this matter, however, Agnes was not disturbed. She was filled with remorse at having revealed, even to one single person, that disgrace which her dead father had been so solicitous to conceal. True, she could not have permitted this man to marry her while the secret remained untold; but why had she not sacrificed her own wishes (for she no longer attempted to conceal from herself that her heart was another's) to so sacred a trust? Had not Carlyon himself set her an example in preserving his own father's memory from obloquy? How weak and wicked she had been! No wonder Carlyon had sent her no reply; offended, no doubt, less by the nature of the family disgrace than by her own selfish disclosure of it. And yet surely he might have written to her too, even if it had been that word "No" with which a year ago she had driven him from his home at Mellor.

She could not read; she could not work; she could only sit with her hands before her and think, and think, and listen. Was that the postman's knock? No. And yet it could hardly be any visitor. Nobody had called upon her since she had been in town, for scarcely any of her acquaintance knew of her being there. Doubtless, this arrival concerned the lodgers who occupied the dining-room floor. Anything that diverted her mind from its present melancholy, even for a moment, was welcome, and she listened with attention. There must be many visitors—more than one or two—to judge by the time that they took to enter the house. Why, too, should they delay in the hall, instead of—— But now it was certain that they were ascending, although very deliberately, to the drawing-room in which she sat. The slowness of their movements, and the frequent

halts that they seemed to make, suggested that one among them, at least, must be very old or feeble—as old as her poor father, perhaps, whose secret she had so fruitlessly betrayed. The door opened, and in walked Mr. Martin, with a gaunt man, very white and shrunken, leaning heavily upon his arm.

"Mr. Carlyon!" cried she, with an involuntary cry of wonder.

"The same, miss, and no other," returned the surgeon, quietly; "and he would be obliged to you if you would offer him a chair."

In the extremity of her astonishment she had forgotten how much this exertion must have cost the invalid; but in a moment she was herself again, and had wheeled round the sofa and arranged the cushions as she had done so often for him in his own chamber.

"I thought it was better, Agnes, that I should come and see you myself——"

"I didn't; mind *that*," interrupted the surgeon. "I thought it was madness."

"Better to tell you what I had to say by word of mouth, than to offer any explanation by letter," continued Carlyon, feebly. "You must have thought me very brutal, Agnes, these last two days."

"Brutal, Mr. Carlyon! Why so? I blamed myself, but not so much as I do now, seeing that I have caused you to be so imprudent as to venture hither."

"I should have come yesterday, if Mr. Martin would have let me out; he kept me prisoner against my will, until I threatened to apply for a writ of Habeas Corpus. Sit down here, Agnes, close by me, for my voice is weak."

"Mendacious hypocrite!" muttered the surgeon; "he bawled at my coachman to drive faster, until I expected the man would have given me warning on the spot."

Agnes took her seat, as Carlyon requested, very white and quiet. He had come, she thought, like a brave man as he was, to tell her face to face, that he was too proud to marry a woman who, because of a family disgrace, bore a name that was not her own. How rightly was she about to be punished for her selfish conduct!

"Our excellent friend, Mr. Martin yonder, has placed in my hands a document written by yourself, Agnes, and relating to certain private affairs connected with your family. He did so with a good motive, I am sure; but he did not know me."

"It was I myself who told him to give it to you, Mr. Carlyon."

"I know it. It was not unnatural, perhaps, that one, with so delicate a sense of duty, placed in your position, should have done so. Otherwise, and supposing you had been in

his place, you would have known me better; you would have said, as I hope and believe, 'John Carlyon will never read it.' Here it is, Agnes, with the seals unbroken. If the secret it contains be any misfortune which it is within my power to remedy, or mitigate; if it be any sorrow, which may be lightened to yourself by another's sympathy, I will hear it from your lips. If not, let it remain unrevealed. Of whatever nature it may be, the knowledge of it could no more weaken my devoted love for you, my ardent hope (presumptuous as it seems) that you may become my wife, Agnes, than some small stream of brackish water, newly set a flowing, could alter the saltness of the sea into which it runs; but I do not wish to hear it. If the telling of a secret be the proof of some women's love, let the keeping of one be yours for me. Take it; burn it. And when it is burnt, be sure

that the evidence of its existence is thereby not more surely destroyed than any—the least misgiving of what it may have been, has vanished from my own bosom. Agnes, dear Agnes, you have blessed me beyond all that words can tell; but I still ask for more. Say, tell me: Will you be my wife?"

There was no verbal response; but nevertheless she answered with her lips.

"Really," murmured Mr. Martin, after he had stared discreetly out of the window for a considerable period, "I am hanged if they have not forgotten I am in the room.—Mr. Carlyon," exclaimed he, aloud, "I have got other patients besides yourself and this young lady (for I consider that I have prescribed for her, and with considerable success), and I can't afford to keep my horses standing still here all day. It is time for us to be off. My dear Miss Agnes, whom I beg leave to most

heartily congratulate, you cannot use your newly acquired supremacy to better purpose than to order this sick man home."

"My good friend," remonstrated Carlyon, coolly, "I tell you what you'd better do, if you really *have* got other patients to attend to. Go and see them, by all means, and then come back and call for me. I assure you I feel much better since the morning, and in perfectly safe hands."

So the good surgeon, laughing very merrily, left patient and nurse together, and started off on his professional round.

"He looks quite another man already!" chuckled Mr. Martin, when he found himself alone in his brougham, with its pockets stored with cases of horrid implements; "upon my life there may be something in physicians' prescriptions after all. I never saw such a satisfactory result from a mere external application of lip-salve before."

CHAPTER XVII.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

THE first person to whom Carlyon wrote to tell of his approaching marriage with Agnes was sister Meg; and she wrote him back a letter, filled half with good wishes and half with good advice, the last solely with reference to the economy of a household; "for," said she, "with respect to your spiritual welfare it is impossible that you can have a better teacher than she whom you have chosen; whereas, as respects pecuniary expenditure, she is culpably lavish."

To Mr. Carstairs, the convalescent, out of

the exuberance of his spirits, could not help sending a mourning card with,

JOHN CARLYON.

Friends will please accept the intimation,

on one side; and on the other,

Of his marriage in September next.

In return, he received the most disinterested congratulations from the kind-hearted doctor, and a budget of country news. "I am sorry to say," wrote he, "that these insatiable sands of ours have been devouring more victims. Old Stephen Millet and his son were both lost some nights ago during a dense fog; the former, they say, was not himself—having fallen of late more than ever into his old habits—and that William perished in the attempt to get him home. Heaven only knows how it was; but a nobler or more self-sacrificing soul than that young man

never drew breath. I have just seen them laid in the same grave. There is another vacancy among us here, which, in my opinion, is by no means to be so regretted. Mrs. Newman and I agreed to keep it to ourselves while Miss Agnes was in trouble about other matters; but there is no reason why she should not be told now. The second morning after her mistress left Mellor, Cubra suddenly disappeared. As she never goes upon the sands, I did not apprehend any danger from that source; after much inquiry, I came to the conclusion that she had been sent for by that unhappy young man to accompany him in his flight; and on application to the shipping-office, I find that a person answering to her description embarked in the same vessel as Richard Crawford. Thus, the poor old woman has been faithful to her young master to the last, according to her

lights, sad will-of-the-wisps though they were. I am glad for both your sakes that they can now lead neither him nor her so dangerously astray; and for poor Richard's sake, that he has some one who will cleave to him whithersoever he has gone."

Poor Richard! That was how Carlyon and his wife always spoke of her unhappy cousin —never with anger or uncharitableness. To believe him mad was the most consoling creed which they could hold.

The newly married couple did not make their home at Mellor. There was an association connected with that place that made it painful to Carlyon to do so. Though he was far from entertaining an un-Christian despair respecting any man's future, though the more he experienced of God's love and mercy (and he experienced much) the less was he prone to plumb their depth, and say, "It ends here

—or here;" yet, he could not now regard that tombstone in the churchyard, with "Gone to join the majority" upon it, with the old sardonic indifference. It was curious enough that *that* should be the bitterest drop in Carlyon's cup after all; but so it was.

He and Agnes made their home in another part of the country; but paid a yearly visit to Mrs. Newman, now installed at Woodlees, which he had settled upon her—the gloomy place having fortunately found no purchaser —for life. She gave one dinner party in their honour on each of these occasions; but it cost her a great deal—not in money, indeed, for it was the reverse of an expensive entertainment, but in many a mental pang.

Robin and the rest of the household suffered for it when the Carlyons went. Having at last reduced her expenditure to a

minimum, this good lady determined to give the public the benefit of her experience, and has occupied her spare time of late in composing those well-known and useful little volumes, "How to live on forty pounds a year—and passing well;" and "Enough is as good as a Feast; or how to make a leg of mutton last a week."

Carlyon put in his protest once or twice for Robin's sake; but sister Meg only replied, "My dear John, you have no idea what that old man eats, although he has not a tooth in his head." Where, however, her brother made a resolute stand and carried his point, was in the stable arrangements. Red Berild had his two feeds of corn per diem, while at Woodlees, in spite of all her protestations; and generally received them, scarcely less from affection than for security, from Agnes' own hand.

As years went on, two little children—first a girl, then a boy—began to hold as the highest treat a ride upon the good old horse, which, they were told, had saved dear mamma's life years ago from the hungry tide. There is no fear of the faithful creature's not being affectionately cared for in his old age, even though his master should die before him. As to that, John Carlyon was no worse when we last heard of him than during that period when Mr. Carstairs put so exact a limit to his days. That gentleman, however, holds to his own opinion that the squire ought to have died years and years ago, and that he owes his present existence only to the heretical nature of his disposition.

"He flew in the face of Providence in his youth," says he, "and having been converted from that error, he now flies in the face of Science."

He has the magnanimity to add, however, "Long may he fly."

And all who are acquainted with John Carlyon as he now is, have good cause to say, Amen.

THE END.

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